

**A CASE STUDY OF TADAO ANDO'S CHURCH OF THE LIGHT AND THE  
EYCHANER/LEE HOUSE; THE TRADITIONAL JAPANESE SENSE OF 'MA'  
AND 'OKU', AND ITS REINTERPRETATION IN CONTEMPORARY  
ARCHITECTURE**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to present the traditional Japanese sense of space, *Ma* and *Oku*, and explore how these two vernacular concepts are reinterpreted and manipulated by Tadao Ando in two recent works: the Church of the Light and the Eychaner/Lee House. In light of *Ma* and *Oku*, this thesis generates four categories in terms of center and periphery, nature and geometry, materiality and immateriality, space and time for the case study of the two buildings. This study intends to identify the underlying design concepts and principles that engender the two works with an architectural expression relating to the traditional sense of *ma* and *oku*. The prime focus of this thesis is to examine Ando's methodology in his reinterpretation of the traditional concept *Ma* and *Oku* within a contemporary context, an approach Ando considers as his criticism on Western Modernism and contemporary consumerism.

This thesis concludes that, by rethinking the Japanese traditional spatial sensibilities *Ma* and *Oku* while reinterpreting them in virtue of the vocabulary developed by an open and universal modern architecture, Ando opens a new horizon to modern architecture that is critical on two interrelated counts: it constitutes an architecture centered on regional cultural identity in opposition to universal Modernism, and it establishes a microcosmic domain for substantial existence in opposition to contemporary consumerism on the other. Ando's architectural ideology is to resort to tradition while being wedged in contemporary



circumstance, and to participate in the modern world while not being absorbed by it. Ultimately, the originality and individuality of Ando's works are perceived and articulated in the gap between the East and the West, between culture and civilization.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION: PERCEIVING THE GAP BETWEEN CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION, TRADITION AND MODERNIZATION**

#### **Cultural Criticism on Contemporary Civilization**

Born in Osaka in 1941, Tadao Ando has practiced his architecture in the same city since he established his own firm of Tadao Ando, Architect & Associates, in 1969. Osaka is Japan's second largest city after Tokyo yet much older. It has, since the early Meiji period, been a city of merchants because of its central position for sea traffic and has become the commercial and industrial hub of Japan after World War II. Like Tokyo and so much else in Japan, Osaka has been drawn into the flood tide of megalopolis development and consumerism of the industrial and post-industrial society. Having gone through the period of rapid economic growth, both urban environment and building interiors are excessively mechanized and deluged with material forms and consumer goods. However, cultural conditions are, in a sense, closed within this modern predicament. In terms of architecture, the storm of Western Modernism, which began to rage through the island Japan after the late 19th century, has rendered abstract the regional and traditional factors and even natural conditions in favor of the pursuit of economic rationalism on the basis of uniformity and mediocrity. Judged against the criteria of universality and functionality, the distinctive regional characters and individual sensibilities of Japanese tradition have been discarded. Space is taken over by the fluidity of homogeneity, and places are made into the

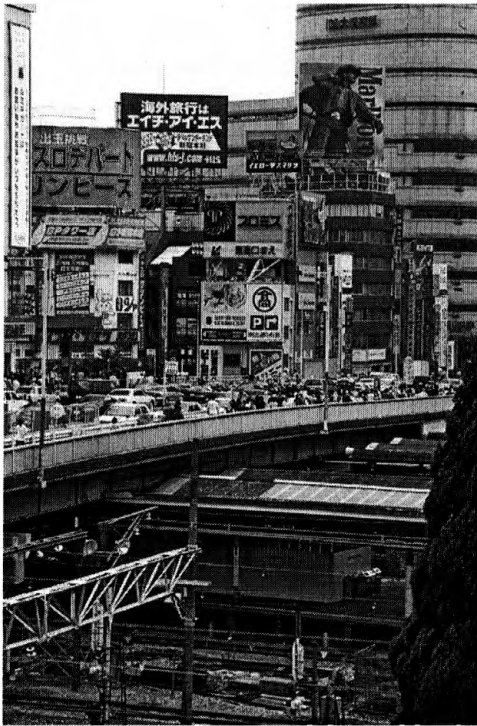


Figure 1.1 Contemporary Japanese city under the impact of consumerism. The city is turned into a chaotic flow of signs and images, and architecture is overwhelmed by visual saturation and ephemeral stimuli, engendering a superficial expression devoid of substantial meaning.

chaos of formlessness (Figure 1.1). Architectural practice, in this situation, becomes no more than a self-indulgent and productive action. While architects compete against each other for free expression and individuality, cultural and urban context are totally subsumed into a handful clichés. Anything flamboyant or even bizarre has a distinct advantage in getting attention, yet none of the architects knows for sure the direction that leads the way across the ever-escalating consumerism. Where the situation leaves no room for humanity, the result is what Kenneth Frampton has lamented regarding the “distance” of modern architecture from its environment: “This self-imposed limitation relates to that which Heidegger has called a ‘a loss of nearness’” (Frampton, 1992, p.297).

It is within this context of contemporary civilization that Tadao Ando has assumed his architectural stance, as he writes:

I believe that, however anachronistic it may sound, it is important to ask the fundamental question: 'what is architecture?' The creation of architecture must be a criticism of the problems of today. It must resist existing conditions. It is only when one faces up to today's problems that one can really begin to deal with architecture (Ando, 1996, p.23).

From this laconic passage, we are able to identify Ando's practice as critical on the ground that he assumes a culturally oppositional stance to the contemporary context - that is, the universal domination of Western Modernism, and the ever-escalating consumerism of contemporary megapolis. And it is precisely here that Ando has proposed two interrelated themes that underlie the entire body of his work, wherein on the one hand, there is a preoccupation with the reestablishment of an architecture centered on regional individuality in opposition to universality, and on the other hand, there is an attempt at the evocation of the substantial existence of human beings in opposition to consumerism. In Ando's case, this counterthesis to modern reality is predicted by his resorting to the Japanese cultural tradition, wherein the traditional sense of *ma* and *oku* is consciously manipulated in his creation of architectural space as a response to the problems of today. And it is Ando's methodology in reinterpreting and representing the traditional spatial sensibilities within a contemporary context that this thesis seeks to present and understand in the following chapters. And here, I would like to continue introducing Ando's ideology on these two traditional concepts with regard to contemporary context in terms of consumerism and modernism.

## Contemporary Humanity and Contemporary Consumerism

Set against the consumer-oriented society of material abundance, Ando intends to imbue people with the sense of “emptiness,” which will eventually be seen as an intrinsic attribute of the concept *Ma*. This emptiness, be it physical or metaphysical, is a principal concept of Ando’s works, wherein he confirms that the kind of emptiness he aims at is to evoke, by way of the simplification of all the unnecessary surface qualities, what he considers the most real - the “essence of space” that is able to inform the ultimate state of being. And it is important here to note that in Japanese cultural tradition, this emptiness is not taken as nihilism, but instead the very essence of existence to which all being relates. In a modern world overrun by sensory chaos and transient pleasures, Ando treats emptiness as a kind of eternal fullness that is to spark in our daily activities and is absolutely life affirming. The second concept, which reinforces the first, is the sense of *oku* that signifies the original point of existence in land and gives birth to the centripetal territory formation in traditional place making. In the often chaotic sprawl of modern megapolis, Ando finds affinity with the sense of *oku* and is determined to create a microcosmic domain so centripetal in orientation that individuals may escape the urban morass, and regain the substantial meanings of existence that have been devalued in modern urbanism and consumerism.

In these connections, it is clear that Ando’s strong commitment to traditional sensibilities of space is by no means a fictitious, nostalgic sentiment imposed upon an otherwise sterile and harsh reality, but an evocative and



provocative effort aimed at the enrichment of human spirit. His view is to resort to tradition, while engaging in the contemporary.

### ***Sukiya* Tradition and Western Modernism**

In talking about Ando, we should not forget his unique progress as an autodidact who studied architecture empirically by traveling through different cultures instead of attending universities.<sup>1</sup> Neither should we neglect the debt he owed to Le Corbusier for his tenets of classic Modernism. Experience of this kind developed his cross-cultural criticism, valid for the occidental as for the oriental. And yet as Ando acknowledges, the most immense influence on his work has remained the traditional architecture of his own country.

Ando's hometown, the Kansai region (i.e., the Osaka/Kyoto area), is the birthplace of *sukiya* tradition, which is a major influence on pre-modern Japanese culture, and still characterizes the essential cultural spirit of today. In relation to architecture, one can go as far as to say that the spatial quality of traditional Japanese architecture, summarized in the two fundamental concepts *Ma* and *Oku*, is best represented by the *sukiya*-style architecture.<sup>2</sup> Exposed to this tradition, Ando is clearly influenced by such roots. However, Ando makes no

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<sup>1</sup> Ando writes of his own progress and approach on architecture: "When I was young, I often went to Kyoto and Nara and visited old Japanese buildings such as works of *sukiya* and *machiya* (townhouse). However, when I began my practice, I looked to the West for my architectural models and believed that to create works of architecture was to design Western buildings. I rejected traditional, Japanese-style architecture. Nevertheless, I have always remained conscious of traditional Japanese architecture. ..It is important that I learn things through my body and spirit than through works...In effect, by going abroad, I become closer to both Japan and that foreign country, and the things inside me and things outside me intermingle and stimulate each other." Tadao Ando, "From the Periphery of Architecture," *The Japan Architect* (January, 1991), p.12.

<sup>2</sup> Inoue writes: "the tea house and *sukiya*-style residences, which best characterize the development and achievement of (feudal) period, are often used to represent Japanese architecture in comparison with foreign architecture." Mitsuo Inoue, *Space in Japanese architecture* (New York: Weatherhill, 1985), p.137.



formal or stylistic reference to *sukiya* by adopting vernacular elements such as timber structure or shoji panels. Instead, his reference is a tonal one wherein there is an attempt to arouse the sensation of *sukiya* space in such a way as to lay bare its underlying concept of *ma* and *oku*, which for Ando is seen to constitute the cultural identity of his architecture.<sup>3</sup> In fact, throughout this thesis *sukiya* architecture appears as a transparent indication, which provides us a living icon that sheds light on the elusive concept *Ma* and *Oku* in traditional space making, and at the same time, constitutes an architectural prototype that Ando constantly alludes to in his manipulation of the traditional sense of *ma* and *oku*.

However, while Ando's architecture is removed from any formal features of vernacular style, it is linguistically descended from Western Modernism, as explicitly in his consistent use of industrialized materials, steel, sheet glass, and bare concrete. And like Le Corbusier, Ando believes universal laws and proportion of geometry are powerful means to transcend space to a level of immeasurable harmony and reason.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, Ando inherits the compositional methods of Modernism and creates his architectural form on the basis of simple geometry. This dichotomous reference to both traditions reflects Ando's paradoxical attitude towards modern reality: there is a preoccupation with the resuscitation of indigenous identity, and at the same time, there is a recognition

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<sup>3</sup> Frampton writes: "Ando follows the *Sukiya* manner in his preference for dim lights broken by shafts of light unexpectedly entering the darkness. Likewise, he attempts to create a feeling of spiritual expansiveness within a small domain. And while both expressions are patently artificial they succeed nonetheless in evoking a feeling for nature as an ineffable, all-pervasive presence." Tadao Ando, *Tadao Ando: Buildings, Projects, Writings/ edited by Kenneth Frampton* (New York: Rizzoli, 1984), p.8.

<sup>4</sup> Corneilis van de Ven, *Space in Architecture* (Assen/Maastricht, The Netherlands; Wolfenboro, N.H., U.S.A.: Van Gorcum, 1987), pp. 190-191.

of modern forms for its continuing validity as a universal force. And the resulting approach to architecture is expressed in his own words:

Born and bred in Japan, I do my architectural work here. And I suppose it would be possible to say that the method I have selected is to apply the vocabulary and techniques developed by an open, universalist Modernism in an enclosed realm of individual life styles and regional difference (Ando, 1982, pp.8-9).

With regard to Modernism, therefore, it is possible to claim that Ando's work is critical on two interrelated counts: it intends to evoke the enduring significance of traditional spatial sensibilities *Ma* and *Oku* by way of a modern vocabulary; and yet this same attempt also permits Ando to inflect the ubiquitous homogeneity of Modernism with regard to the attributes of autochthonous culture.

## **Structure of Thesis**

The passage above introduces Ando's architectural ideology, his criticism of consumerism and Modernism, that ultimately assumes his rethinking of the traditional spatial sensibilities in his works. In the following chapters, I seek to elaborate the traditional concept *Ma* and *Oku* and explore how these two vernacular concepts of space are further incorporated and manipulated by Tadao Ando in the two recent works: the Church of the Light and the Eychaner/Lee House. The major focus of this thesis is to examine the methodology in Ando's reinterpretation of the traditional concept *Ma* and *Oku* within a contemporary context, the approach that enables Ando to stimulate a sense of substantial existence on one hand, and to establish a modern architecture of regional individuality on the other.

Towards this end, this thesis has two major parts. The traditional part (chapters 2, 3, and 4) presents an elaboration of the traditional concept *Ma* and *Oku* in their original sense by relating them to their place making in traditional Japanese architecture, with *sukiya* style as an exemplar. In chapters 2 and 3, the concept of *ma* is interpreted in terms of space/emptiness, and time/interval/flux, respectively. And in chapter 4, the concept of *Oku* is interpreted in terms of depth/invisible center. The contemporary part (chapters 5 and 6) constitutes the main body of the thesis and presents the case study of Ando's work, the Church of the Light and the Eychaner/Lee House, one in each chapter. Both works are presented and interpreted in terms of center/periphery, nature/geometry, materiality/immateriality, space/time, the four categories each set in light of *ma* and *oku*. These two chapters identify the underlying design concepts and principles that engender the two works with an architectural expression relating to the traditional sense of *ma* and *oku*. Finally, chapter 7 presents an overall evaluation of the two works and concludes the thesis by examining the originality of Ando's work with regard to his criticism of contemporary civilization. In specific terms, this chapter justifies the validity of Ando's methodology in his reinterpretation of the concepts *Ma* and *Oku* and the validity of such an approach in an architecture for substantial existence and regional individuality.

## CHAPTER 2

### MA – SPACE, EMPTINESS

#### The Idea of *Ku* and Emptiness

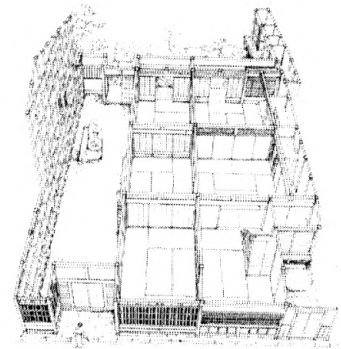
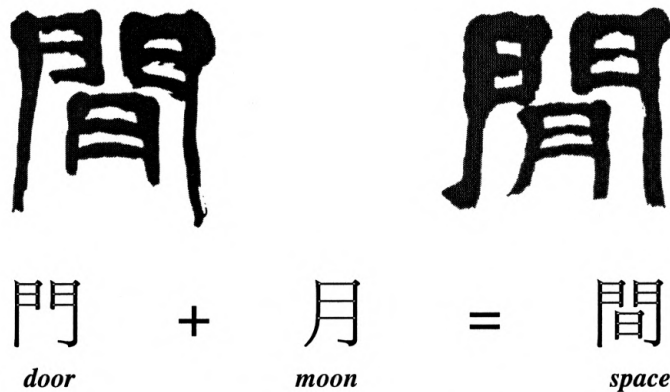


Figure 2.1 The ideogram *Ma*. Its symbolic composition and semantic implication.

The traditional Japanese sense of space is *Ma*. In the contemporary Japanese language (Figure 2.1), *ma* is written as the above character (間).<sup>5</sup> But in its original Chinese, the character (間) is composed as (間), consisting of the pictorial symbol for “moon” (月), instead of the present one for “sun” (日), within the symbol for “door” (門). Therefore, the ideogram thus used consciously by Chinese and Japanese, vividly portrays the perceiving of a subtle instant of moonlight leaking inside through a gap in the gateway.<sup>6</sup> Within this semantic context, the Japanese concept of *ma* expresses well the simultaneous awareness of space and time on one hand, and both of them are perceived as identical with the occurring events on the other.

<sup>5</sup> In Japanese language, pronunciation of the character (間) varies from *Kan*, *Ken*, or *Aida*, but it chiefly reads *Ma*. This is not to concern us any further since it does not affect our understanding of the word.

<sup>6</sup> For the semantic meaning of this vernacular character *ma* as well as this formal analysis, see Gunter Nitschke, *From Shinto to Ando: studies in architectural anthropology in Japan* (London: Academy Editions; Berlin: Ernst & Sohn; New York: Distributed to the trade in the United States of America by St. Martin's Press, 1993), pp.49-61.

The concept of space has ever played a significant role in Western architectural history, and the understanding of space at any stage has its parallel in the understanding of science and mathematics current at that period. Space is considered as an absolute entity with Euclidean geometry as its true nature and is treated as a physical factor and in a rational way independent of human perception and the material objects it contains. Space and time are separate dimensions for the Western mind; the space/time theory results from the addition of time superimposed upon the three dimensions of space.

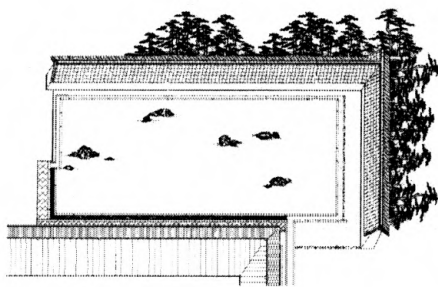
Japan has since early times included no scientific evolution in the Western sense and so the notion of space has never occurred at all in Japanese history. Space in traditional Japanese architecture seems to be merely a leftover or negative matter. In both Shinto and Buddhist belief, space is essential nothing but a particularization of one's consciousness and has its root in the phenomenal world of nature.<sup>7</sup> It is induced and generated by the spiritual qualities of forms and elements as they exist in the constant flow of events in time. Therefore, there is no separate existence as a spatial entity. Rather, the sense of *ma* describes the interpenetration of both space and time, "really nothing more than a hidden system, a capacity for aesthetically evaluating the 'nonexistent'" (Bognar, 1985, p.61).

Notwithstanding the absence of a spatial concept in the Western sense, I feel, to borrow the Eastern Buddhist terminology, that the word "emptiness," or "*ku*" in Japanese, would best express the essential nature of the peculiar

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that the Japanese culture and tradition are largely determined by two major elements in religious sense: Shintoism and Buddhism. Shinto is the Japanese indigenous religion, which dates back to ancient times; while Buddhism was introduced to Japan from China around sixth century A.D.

Japanese sense of space, or simply *ma*.<sup>8</sup> As a matter of fact, the Japanese word for space is *ku-kan*, a compound of both *ku*(空) and *kan*(間), the latter of which is also read *ma*. It should be noted that the combination of *ku* and *kan* is in no case an accident; they are correlated concepts influenced by longstanding Chinese and Japanese culture and tradition, including Buddhism. And it is true that the term *ku* “permeates Eastern ‘object and space’ creations wherever Buddhism has had any influence” (Nitschke, 1966, p.154).



$$\begin{array}{ccccccc}
 \text{空} & + & \text{間} & = & \text{空間} \\
 ku & & ma & & \text{space} \\
 & & & & \text{(Literally, empty place)}
 \end{array}$$

Figure 2.2 Montage of the Rock Garden of *Ryoanji* in *Kyoto*. The best example showing the sense of *ma* stems from a deep metaphysical consciousness, *ku*.

Emptiness, as an architectural intangibility deeply rooted in the Eastern spatial consciousness, is what this chapter will focus on. Before we proceed, it is important to examine what is implied by this term. In Japanese, the word *ku* means “emptiness” or “void,” borrowing the Chinese character *kong* (空).<sup>9</sup> The term *ku* is familiar to the Eastern mind in three different contexts. Physically, it means a “hole,” which is a void within material substance suggesting the potential to hold things or to be occupied. Phenomenally, it stands for a “hole in the universe” (in this case, it is read *sora*), that is “sky,” implying the most

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that the term “*ku*” or “emptiness” is constantly used by Buddhist Philosophy, but it is not limited to Buddhism. In a general sense, it is a central idea for all the main schools of Eastern philosophy, such as Taoist, Neo-Confucianism, and Buddhism.

<sup>9</sup> “*Kong*” in its original Chinese is a semantic-plusphonetic character, consisting of its plusphonetic part “工”, pronounced as Gong, and its semantic sign as “穴”, meaning a “hole”. This interpretation is according to *Modern Chinese Dictionary*.



intangible and infinite place where all natural phenomena and changes take place. In the light of Buddhist philosophy, the idea of *ku* is further sublimated into the metaphysical realm and thus reveals its religious and cultural significance.<sup>10</sup> Here a distinction must be made between the idea of “*relative void*” and “*Great Void*” within Buddhist teaching. The *relative void* (or simply “emptiness”) denotes the world of particulars, the phenomenal realm where all forms undergo a dynamic and transitory process of perpetual generation and extinction. The *Great Void* (or “Absolute Emptiness”), a metaphysical concept, refers to the ultimate entity of the universe from which all particulars of the phenomenal world derive and vanish, yet itself is a uniform tranquility beyond all forms and all transformations. And the *relative void* and the *Great Void* are thus dynamically interpenetrated so that each is the *sin qua non* of the other to the extent that the Buddhists deny any distinction between *form* and *formless*.<sup>11</sup>

Within these contexts, especially that of Buddhism, the idea of *ku* or “emptiness” implies the potential of the “non-existence” to hold things, or moreover, a state of intangibility as the realm where being and nonbeing are united in their mutable transformations and changes.<sup>12</sup> And it is central to the

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<sup>10</sup> For the semantic interpretation of the term *ku* and its relation to *ma* and Buddhist metaphysics as influenced by Chinese and Japanese culture, see Kisho Kurokawa. *Rediscovering Japanese Space* (New York: Weatherhill, 1988), pp.54-56, 64-65. For the following metaphysical meaning and the relation between Relative void and Great Void, see Nitschke (1966), p.154, and Yu-Lan Fung, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1976), pp.278-280.

<sup>11</sup> The ultimate reality is so called “Emptiness” or “Formless” because it is beyond all forms and defies all description and intellectual interpretation. In the terminology of Prajñā School, *śūnyatā* (“emptiness”) is *tathatā* (“suchness”), and *śūnyatā* is *tathatā*: *śūnyatā* is the world of the Absolute, and *tathatā* is the world of particulars. for the mutual inclusive of the two, see D.T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (New York: MJF Books, 1959), pp.35-37.

<sup>12</sup> The notion of emptiness, mostly influenced by Buddhism, is accepted by Japanese since early medieval time as the basic attributes of reality and natural world. The emptiness of this kind is best compared to “mind” as described in *Tsurezuregusa*: “Emptiness accommodates everything. I wonder if thoughts of all kinds intrude themselves at will on our minds because what we call our minds are vacant? If our minds were occupied, surely so many things would not

Buddhist philosophy that the ultimate entity manifests itself into infinite possibilities in the phenomenal realm, and thereby the grasp of spirit is attained only by means of forms within their temporal flux. In relation to architecture, it means no less than the fact that the one entity of space-time is particularized by and perceived with the symbolic elements, or “happenings” within.

In this way, we are getting close to the Japanese concept of space, which, in the following, I will refer to as *emptiness*, or simply *ma*. And we know from above that this *emptiness* is not to be taken as merely “nothingness”; neither does it negate an objective awareness of the fixed and static *form* as opposed to the subjective awareness of lived and experiential *non-form*. Although it is not meant as religious teaching, I feel the term *emptiness* could be used to imply the simultaneous awareness of space and time, in terms of void and flux respectively; object (*form*) and space (*non-form*); objective-outer world (the sensible form as manifested in the phenomena world) and subjective-inner world (the “suchness” or essential forms as grasped in one’s mind). Ultimately, one could define *emptiness* as the interstitial realm of spatial void and temporal flux wherein events and phenomena take place. As Zevi puts it, “That space-void-should be the protagonist of architecture is after all natural. Architecture is environment, the stage on which our lives unfold” (Zevi, 1957, p.32).

Parenthetically, this definition also squares with Nitschke’s exposition of *ma* in the English term “place,” since place is really no more than the totality of

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enter them.” Kenkō Yoshida, *Essays in idleness: the Tsurezuregusa of Kenkō* (New York: Columbia University Press, c1998), p.192.



physical appearance, activities and meanings.<sup>13</sup> Or as Nitschke sum up in an oriental fashion, “*Place (Ma)* does not differ from *void*, nor *void* differ from *place*; *Place* is this *void* and *void* is this *place*” (Nitschke, 1966, p.152).

With the aid of the Japanese concept of *ma* as discussed, we are in position to examine built forms, and see how the essential quality of emptiness is manifested in traditional space creation. In point, I will present two fine examples. The first one is the holy space in Shintoism, which represents the most primordial stage of Japanese space development; the second example used is the *Sukiya* space in the spirit of Zen Buddhism, which is often used to represent its most advanced stage and also best characterizes the fundamental nature of Japanese architectural space.<sup>14</sup> Here, an explanation is necessary regarding the connection between the two cases used. It is true that the Buddhist idea *ku* sheds much light on our understanding of the nature of *ma*. But as a consciousness shaped by long cultural traditions, the idea *ma* is by no means limited, but only necessary to Buddhist influenced space-making. Because religious beliefs do have immense influence on the shaping of space, I will discuss the paradigm-shift in religious attitudes, hence space consciousness, between the two case studies in the attempt to bring to light the continuity along the progression of space creation. Historically, the space cognition evolved at the ancient stage originates the idea of *ma* and has been extended to the traditional

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<sup>13</sup> Edward Relph, *Place and placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976), p.45.

<sup>14</sup> According to Mitsuo Inoue, there are two reasons to use *Sukiya*-style as the model of traditional Japanese architecture and space. First, *sukiya* style evolved in the Feudal period of Japan, during which its culture almost developed entirely independently. It therefore can be argued that the architecture of this period was in essence the most Japanese in history. The second reason is that the architecture shaped during this period is the closest to the modern time and still survives today as well as part of current thinking. Therefore, by examining *sukiya*-style, much can be understood of the fundamental nature of Japanese space. See Mitsuo Inoue, *Space in Japanese architecture* (New York: Weatherhill, 1985), p.137.

method of developing space. So the final stage, being an evolution from the first, builds on it and “has both a deep and superficial resemblance to it”, remarks Nitschke (1966, p.118). The intuitive mode, however, is replaced here by a profound consciousness of the later time. Therefore, one rather finds from their distinctions, religious and historical, a shared consciousness of space deeply rooted in the same foundation of cultural spirit. And it is this elusive concept that we must illuminate to understand.

### **Space Influenced by Shintoism**

The ancient Japanese maintained a pantheistic world view, which is fully expresses by the indigenous Shinto religion. According to Shinto belief, the universe is interpreted as the permeations of all divinities, or *kami*, which are believed to descend to earth with specific ritual procedures.<sup>15</sup> In the imaginative pattern, people sense divine spirituality and communicate their feeling by linking them to natural environments or objects, such as mountain, trees, and rocks, in which *kami* are thought to reside during their temporary visit. Within this context, space is also understood as “universal.” It is rooted in land and is induced by the spiritual quality of natural place rather by buildings. Space-making therefore becomes only a leftover matter. Or rather, space is perceived as the mysterious

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<sup>15</sup> As Bognar interprets: Shinto, meaning precisely the “way of gods” or “divine way,” it is not a religion in a strict sense. Rather, it is a form of oriental animism and Japanese mythology. Shinto believe that spirits dwell in practically every phenomenon of nature, including such living and nonliving things as the sun, stars, mountains, trees...as well as in a particular locality. The word *kami* literally means “above,” “higher,” “superior,” or the top of the hierarchy. In Shinto, *kami* actually means “divine spirit” or “spirit of ancestor”, but in English, it is often translated as “God” or “Goddess.” Botond Bognar, *Contemporary Japanese Architecture: Its Development and Challenge* (New York : Van Nostrand Reinhold, c1985), p.61.

atmosphere caused by the symbolic meaning of constituent forms, a combination of varied natural elements and man-made things.

## Space and Form

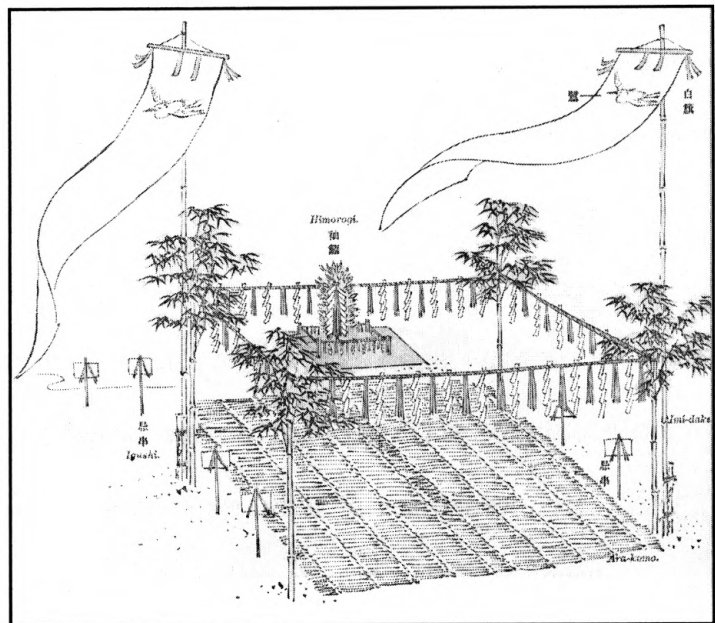
神  
籬

### Himorogi

The HI of HIMOROGI means the activity of *tama* (soul). MORO refers to *mori* (forest), and the whole word means "the place where *kami* descend".

ヒモロギ

Figure 2.3 Diagram of the *Himorogi*. The simplest form of shrine used in Shinto for temporary celebration of a particular deity.



In Shinto, the archetypal form for the holy is *himorogi*, a place to which *kami* descend (Figure 2.3).<sup>16</sup> During ceremonies, the holy zone is represented by a square or rectangle empty space on white gravel or pebbles delineated by four delicate posts at each of its corner. The boundary of this space is marked by binding around the posts a sanctified straw rope (*shimenawa*), from which immaculate strips of paper representing the brilliance of the sun (*gohei*) are suspended. The *yorishiro* column, often combines with other natural objects such as sea rocks or branches of evergreen tree, is placed at the center of the empty

<sup>16</sup> The HI of HIMOROGI means the activity of *tama* (soul). MORO refers to *mori* (forest), and the whole word means "the place where *kami* descend". See David B. Stewart, *The Making of A Modern Japanese Architecture* (Tokyo; New York: Kodansha International, 1987), p.267.

space, through which *kami* are believed to descend into the *himorogi*. Divinity's space is thus created and the *himorogi* actually becomes a shrine. This is the original Japanese means of delineating space.

While accepted as qualitatively distinct from the profane surroundings, the holy space is only loosely enclosed and remains visually identical to them. This method of space-making strongly contrasts to the usual Western ones in which a three-dimension entity is clearly visualized between solid planes and concrete forms. In *himorogi*, the paradox of the disregard of forms and the significance of space results when too much emphasis is given to the sense of invisible qualities and the spirit of mystic events. Devoid of concreteness, space is rather considered as emptiness, but it is by no means vacuous. The emptiness opens its potential to be filled, and yet makes open what is complete. The *Kami* in celebration are believed to be present within the spatial void and imbue it with spiritual force (*chi*). Thus the indefinite, almost invisible boundary of the holy space makes it possible that the ongoing event is contacted both physically and experientially by all the perceivers, through which one secures blessing. At the moment when this takes place, emptiness becomes fullness and its potential acquires significance. Through occurrence and significance, the emptiness of space contributes to create an "experiential place," wherein lies poetry and mystery.

As in the idea of *himorogi*, the sense of *ma* shows that space does not exist as an independent entity; neither is it created by the concrete forms or compositional elements, for space merely physically defined and reality

visualized alone imports little experience. Rather, *ma* is something carefully created in one's mind through the invisible presence of an imaginative pattern and the symbolic meaning of the external elements.

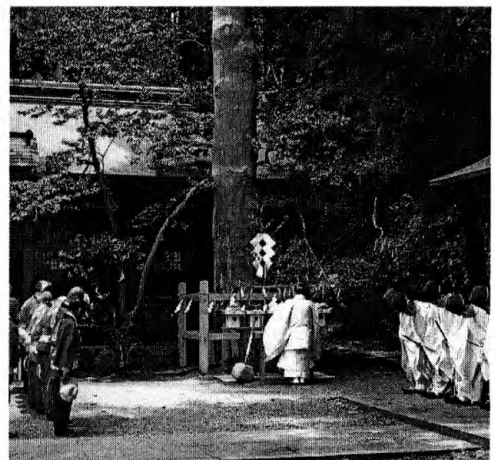


Figure 2.4 Various kinds of *Himorogi* and associated ritual sanctification. (Above) Natural objects of sea rocks deified to a particular *kami* surrounded by a *shimnawa* rope, and all placed on the ground of white pebbles or stones signifying a purification place for divine space. (Below) priests and local community members performing specific ritual rites in inviting the *kami* in celebration down to the sanctified adobe temporarily delineated.



## Space and Time

In Shinto, the religious people sanctify not only space but also time (Figure 2.4). The *himorogi* produced by ritual event is not a permanent structure, but a temporary adobe for divine inhabitation in the living world, erected at a specific location immediately before the ceremony and dismantled immediately afterwards. Spatially, the empty zone delineated by rope binding and post setting is separated from the chaos of profane space, which indicates a place of divine manifestation and creates a center of reference. Temporarily, the time taken up in celebrating the *kami* is isolated from the evanescence of secular time, during which man reenacts the cosmic creation and experiences once again the origin of life.<sup>17</sup> Both space and time in the construction of *himorogi* are conceived as an interruption of the ordinary at a certain point and certain scale, in this way fully expressing in space-making the equivalent of the artistic concept of *ma* as it suggest the “void” pause in descriptive and performing arts. In fact, the vernacular character *ma* semantically means interval in both space and time.<sup>18</sup>

In *himorogi*, the temporary event space is not a static one, but restricted by the flow of time, during which transformation takes place and space acquires new value. The ritual binding prepares a space of emptiness awaiting the divine descent, and the apparent absence of content stimulates one’s anticipation of the event to come. The blank space-time of this kind deeply stirs one’s imagination.

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<sup>17</sup> For more information on space and time, see the chapter Ma: Time, Interval, Flux.

<sup>18</sup> Isozaki translates the meaning of *ma* from the *Iwanami Dictionary of Ancient Time* as: in spatial terms, the “natural distance between two or more things existing in a continuity” or the “space delineated by posts and screens (that is, rooms)” or in temporal terms, “the natural pause or interval between two or more phenomena occurring continuously.” Arata Isozaki, “Ma; Japanese Time Space” catalog for the exhibit “MANtransFORMS”, *The Japan Architect* (February 1979), p.70.

When the shadow of *kami* appears from the emptiness, space undergoes a transformation. The divine force overspreads, penetrates and fills the emptiness, wherein there is neither lack nor superfluity. The meaning of space is thus completed and potentiality turns into actuality. "Perceiving the instant at which this occurred became decisively important for all artistic endeavor (of later time)," remarks Isozaki (Isozaki, 1979, p.71). Yet at the moment *kami* leave, the significance disappears, the once holy space becomes the polluted and is demolished. The experience of space is thus strictly limited to the "happenings" through which flow a sequence of continuous time scales. And this unfailingly shows the Japanese sense of *ma* denotes both space and time as one entity "with the interpretation of space as a two-dimensional facet including time scales." Thereby, in built forms as suggested in *himorogi*, *ma* is experienced as "a four dimensional structure presented in terms of a two-dimension facet including two or more time scales" (ibid., p.71).

The space-time cognition developed during this period in Japan has made an indispensable contribution to the space-making modes of later time. However, along the progression from this most primordial stage to the most advanced one of Japanese space development, there exists a fundamental shift in people's view towards nature and existence, which plays a key role in bringing man's perception of space into deep consciousness. And it is this "paradigm-shift" we must seek to understand.

## **From the Dualistic to the Holistic**

In his research essay *Beyond Fence and Focus – Beyond Sacred and Profane*, Günter Nitschke discussed the “paradigm-shift” in the concept of the holy when the Japanese indigenous religion Shintoism came in contact with Buddhism introduced from China in mid six century AD. According to Nitschke, the central religious question in the search for holy changed from “who and where are the gods?” to “Who and where am I?”, and human consciousness became a subject to explore, “to the extent that belief tended towards Buddhism and away from Shintoism” (Nitschke, 1993, pp.72-73). The old Shintoism is based on a paradigm of clear dichotomy between man and god, the holy space-time and the ordinary, the center and the periphery, an overall dualistic worldview. Within the Buddhist influence, the search for holy switched to the experience of human consciousness, through various meditation methods, from which emerged a holistic worldview. This is based on the basic creed of Buddhism that all form and existences in the world are phenomenal manifestations of the absolute emptiness, the essence of the universe. The holy is, therefore, in truth no less than the concreteness of reality itself. And origin is always “present” and “here” rather than the particular sanctified space-time of Shinto. The previous magic and mythical consciousness, according to Gesber, is replaced by a diaphanous one, within which the whole universe is embraced. And only the person who is united with everything becomes the holy. This is what D.T.Suzuki calls “All in One and One in All” (Suzuki, 1959, p.35).



From this “paradigm-shift” emerges a similar yet much deeper space consciousness than the earlier one. The existing intimacy with nature through the deification of pure natural objects in Shintoism now transcends the purely intellectual and pursues instead the sameness of nature and man. Within this context, the potential of space lies not in its accommodation for divine descent, but a potential for infinity of happenings as revealed in nature. What is to be filled is no longer the *kami* spirit, but the very force that animates the whole nature. The space consciousness of this stage lies in man’s attempt to emulate nature’s work for the same principle and to condense and refine in a microcosm the concreteness of realities of the eternal emptiness.

### **Space in Spirit of *Sukiya* Style**

Space falls into the category of *sukiya* is an open-ended one. In the basic sense, *sukiya*-style originates from and also denotes the ceremonial teahouse, a single and independent structure designed for restrained Zen meditation. The traditional teahouse reaches its mature expression under the influence of great Zen master Sen no Rikyu (1521-91), when he borrowed techniques from the *minka*-style and combined the teahouse with his aesthetic ideal of *wabi* in creating a new style of his own.<sup>19</sup> Rikyu is often credited as the father of the *sukiya*-style. In the latter half of the sixteen century, a residential style was built with the architectural techniques of the Rikyu teahouse, and was popularly

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<sup>19</sup> Two main traditional system of planning survive in Japanese residential architecture today are *minka*-style, or folk house, and *sukiya*-style. The first one dates back to early times. Originally, *sukiya*-style borrows techniques from *minka*, and is there by often considered not as opposite but a derivation of the first. For the origins and realizations of the *sukiya*-style, see Teiji Itoh, *The Elegant Japanese House: Traditional Sukiya Architecture* (New York: Walker/Weatherhill, 1969), pp. 44-50. For the *wabi* spirit in *sukiya*-style, see Teiji Itoh, *The Classic Tradition in Japanese Architecture* (New York: Weatherhill, 1972), pp.12-20.

accepted its popularity as *sukiya*-style residence. It is with this second phrase of *sukiya*-style that this text deals. Therefore *sukiya*-style, despite its departing the single teahouse of no more than 4.5 mats to the whole complex in exquisite quarters like the Katsura Detached Palace, is still spiritually intimate with tea ceremony, which is “not only a purely Japanese complex of art and performance, but also in itself a concentration of Japanese conduct” (Ando, 1984, p.140). Partly because of this, *sukiya*-style is generally used to characterize the spatial quality of traditional Japanese architecture as well as its best development.

### **Form and Non-Form, Materiality and Immateriality**

The means of space creation used in Shinto is linked closely to the Japanese space-making. Just as the immaculate pebbles and stones on the ground of *himorogi* have been adopted consciously by later Zen masters in the creating of famous dry-garden, the delicate means of rope binding and posts erecting in the delineating of divine’s temporary adobe has, by extension, led to the ingenious design of column and beam system and evolved into “a structural unit for a space for living”, that is “*suki*” (Figure 2.4).<sup>20</sup> As suggested in *himorogi*, the archetypal form of *ma* may have been “walless, empty zones with posts on

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<sup>20</sup> Isozaki discuss the original meaning of *ma* and its development into *suki*, see Isozaki (1979), p.74. For more semantic interpretations, the word *sukiya* is composed of *suki* and *ya*. The latter character *-ya*(屋) is a suffix and stands for “room,” or “house.” The first word *suki*(数寄) has two meanings related to our discussion. Aesthetically, *suki* is usually translated as “refined taste,” or “elegant pursuits.” Objectively, *suki*(隙) suggests a conceptualization of both space and time, as “interval” or “gap.” In temporal terms, *suki* denotes the “time to spare,” which denotes *kan-mi*, the “*sabi* taste.” In spatial terms, *suki* means a “room,” “vacant” and “emptiness.” In this context, *suki* interrelates with *ma* as a space consciousness, and is conceptually synonymous with emptiness. See Suzuki (1959), pp. 284, 108, 143, 158. Also See Nihongo Japanese Language: [http://www.trussel.com/f\\_nih.htm](http://www.trussel.com/f_nih.htm)

each of their corner,” implicitly expressing the insubstantial quality of space as manifested in its physical forms (Isozaki, 1979, p.74).<sup>21</sup>

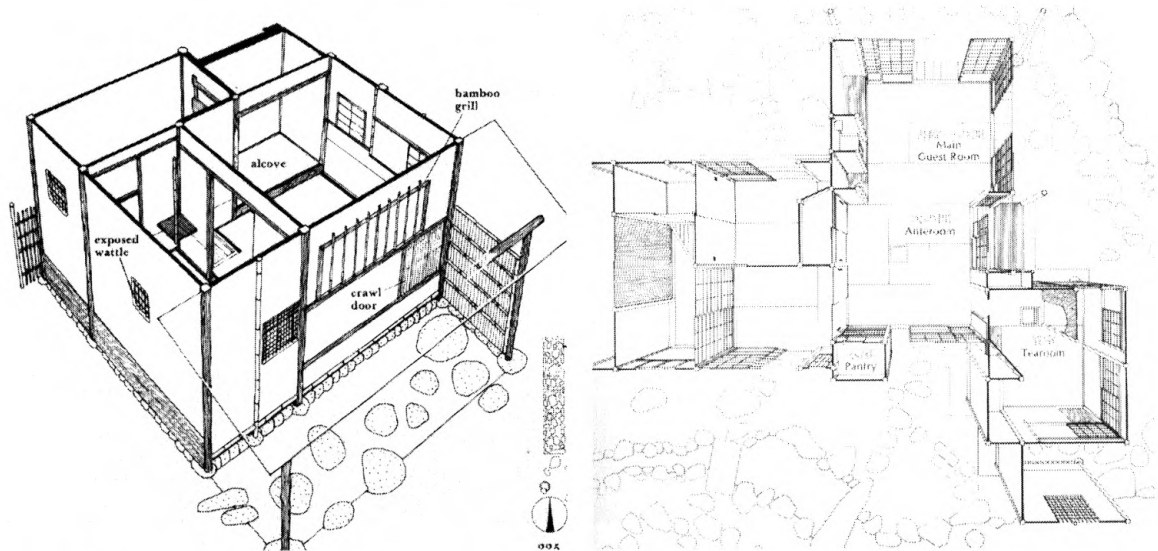


Figure 2.5 Axonometric diagrams of the structural units in *sukiya* architecture. Left is the four-mat Taian Teahouse of Yamazaki in Kyoto, and right is Ryokaku-tei Teahouse of Ninna-ji in Kyoto. In both case, the space-making method could be detected as an extension from the primary means of rope binding and posts erecting in the delineating of *himorogi* space. Also, it is the post rather than wall that plays an important role in the creation of *ma*.

The *sukiya*-space, conceptually speaking, is really no more than the aggregation of these “structural units” linked organically (Figure 2.5). For practical purposes, walls are used to enclose the structural unit, but they are reduced to the extremes of immateriality and permeability so that the emptiness of space is always evoked. In fact, walls do not actually exist in *sukiya* space.

As Nitschke’s points out, “The Japanese sense of place, in connection with fixed form, was linked since earliest times with the post or column, never with the wall” (Nitschke, 1966, p.153). In constructing the house, a wooden skeleton is first set up, which carries the entire load of roof construction. Partly due to the sultry summer in Japan, removable and light layers have always been

<sup>21</sup> For more information of “*suki-ma*”, see Arata Isozaki, “Ma; Japanese Time Space” catalog for the exhibit “MANtransFORMS”, *The Japan Architect* (February 1979), p.70.

preferred in filling the skeleton so that the fixed wall areas made of solid materials, such as earth and clay, are kept to a minimum in *sukiya*-style. These translucent and thin partitions made of wooden lattice and rice paper are of course less substantial than walls. In West, massive walls with tiny holes establish an enclosure of classical substance and order; whereas in Japan, the filling in of a skeleton by large surfaces of translucent partitions dematerialize the building and create an overall sense of lightness and transparency (Figure 2.6).

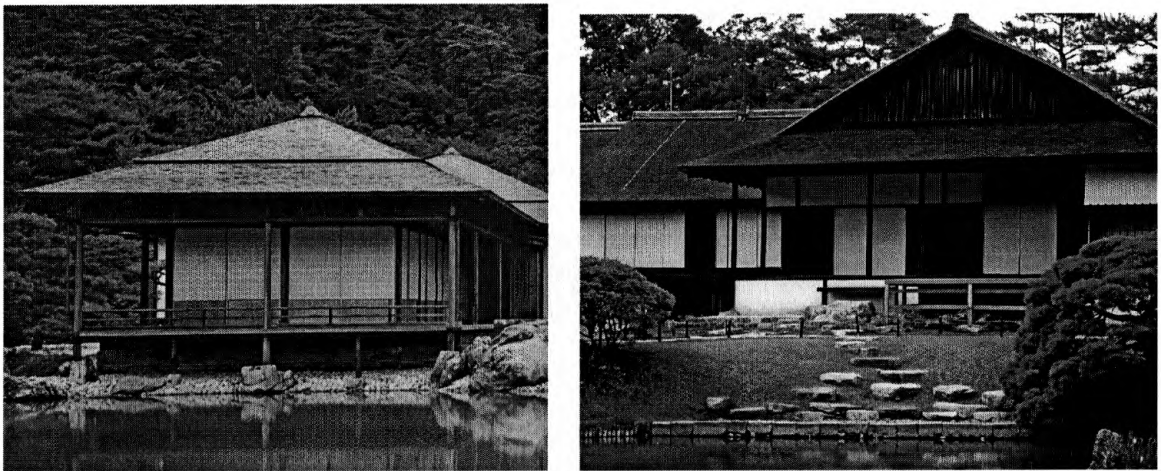


Figure 2.6 Façade of *sukiya* architecture. Left is Kikugetsu-tei of Ritsurin Park in Takamatsu, and on the right is Katsura Vila in Kyoto. Large panels of paper screen are used to fit in the skeleton within the shadows cast by roof overhang. Thereby the façade gives a impression of transparency, and the whole building is thus dematerialized.

Among all the elements of *sukiya* building, the shoji panel (the sliding panel of wood and translucent paper), serving more or less as the exterior “wall,” plays the most complex role in shaping the qualities of architectural space. In the first place, the translucence of shoji determines a permeation of light and lines of vision. Floating on the delicate screen is the misty air of feeble light and dim shadows, and the paper layer becomes no more than a vaporous surface of white glow. Material loses its actuality, disperses, and evaporates into the



surrounding emptiness, which gives an impression of neither existence nor nonexistence. In the second place, the free and flexible placement of shoji creates a direct and genuine continuity between interior and exterior spaces, and the degree of this openness is always subject to control (Figure 2.7). In doing so, the shoji panels builds an ambiguous, almost invisible architectural boundary, and bridges the *ma*, or interval, that simultaneously connects and separates interior and exterior, building and nature. As Ando remarks, “Intervals of this kind that demarcate and interrelate part and part, scene and scene, are a characteristic feature, not only of Japanese architecture, but also of all Japanese art, and might be called a symbol of Japanese aesthetic” (Ando, 1984, p.140).

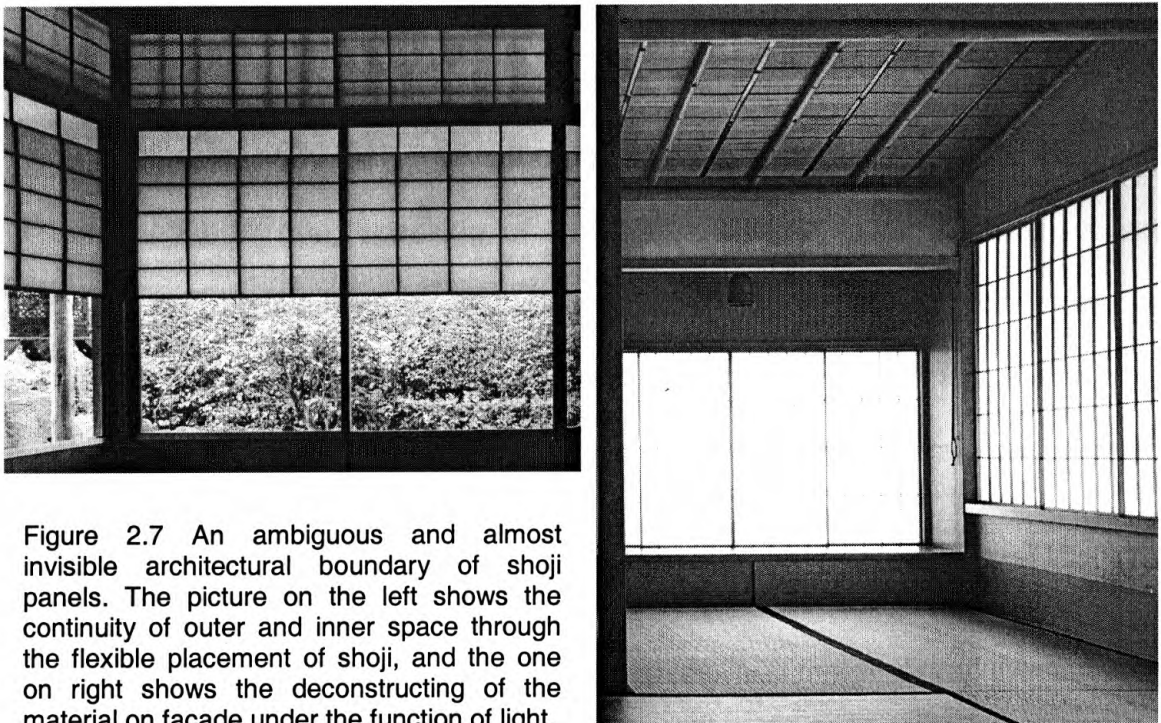


Figure 2.7 An ambiguous and almost invisible architectural boundary of shoji panels. The picture on the left shows the continuity of outer and inner space through the flexible placement of shoji, and the one on right shows the deconstructing of the material on façade under the function of light.

In relation to shoji, another kind paper-covered sliding panels, *fusuma*, takes the full role as interior partitions. The virtue of *fusuma*, like that of shoji, lies in its flexibility in that they can be added or removed to freely decide the morphology and create the fluidity of space. Shoji and *fusuma* have long been used in traditional house, but when adopted in *sukiya* space, the previous “vivid colors are rejected in favor of neutral ones that may not be noticed at all” (Itoh, 1969, p.178). This shows a tendency in space-making to deconstruct the substance to pure image of surface so that anything obtrusive calling attention to material form and away from space were eliminated. Negated as pure background, these paper screens become abstract, giving all reference to the depth of space. The result is a sense of utter transparency of space, flowing from outside to inside, from this place to that place, and ever onward to infinity.

In *sukiya* space-making, we thereby see *ma*, as a principle in the handling of form and non-form, speaking of a dualistic attitude towards materials, an interest not in their substance but in their nonexistence. The consciousness of *ma* shows that there is not a reliance on fixed and material forms, as markedly contrasted to space; but a tendency to treat material as ephemeral, insubstantial “events,” a material devoid of materiality, approaching the essential emptiness of space. Far from being used to demarcate spaces, materials are used to realize a space-continuum; and far from asserting the purity and materiality of themselves, although they do, they are used as an agent to evoke the real existence of space.

Space so created can hardly be understood as a static and three-dimensional entity in a Western sense, but rather perceived as a transitory,

formless fluidity subjected to transformation in the sense of *ma* modulated by the distribution of elusive forms.

This principle of the handling of form and non-form has a spiritual parallel in the Buddhist idea of “impermanence,” which exerts great influence over the Japanese of that time. The Buddhist philosophy rejects any attachment to fixed, static materials and forms, but rather recognizes in them dynamic and transitory manifestations of the underlying, formless “emptiness.”<sup>22</sup> Under this influence, Japanese spatial awareness in the feudal period is strongly colored by spiritualism, which gives the spirit precedence over matter and devotes much attention of the transience of the world. In the aesthetic realm, the same effort is expressed by idea of “the beauty of empty space” in Zen ink paintings. Both of them show an interest not in substance but in emptiness.<sup>23</sup>

### **Space of Fragments, Events, and Transformations**

Entering *sukiya* house, the visitor is charmed by the subdued mood and airy elegance of inner space. There is no striking or obtrusive form that diverts one’s attention, and only the apparent emptiness gives the sense of real existence. When space is made so simply, it is really no more than a void stage, and any subtle happenings projected into the immutable silence would deeply stir one’s imagination. *Sukiya* architecture is always at one with surrounding garden and landscape, and the natural world becomes a genuine extension of inner

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<sup>22</sup> For the idea of “impermanence” and “transience,” and the apprehension of things not as substance but as events, see the chapter on *Ma: Time, Interval, Flux*.

<sup>23</sup> For the ethos of the Japanese feudal period and its influence on art and architectural space see Mitsuo Inoue, *Space in Japanese architecture* (New York: Weatherhill, 1985), pp.135-136.



space. By the extension, natural elements actually fill the potential of space, and impart rich meanings to it. The essential virtue of sukiya space lies in the fact that it refines raw natural materials in a form cut off from the outside world and permits these independent fragments to interweave and scatter within the emptiness of space.

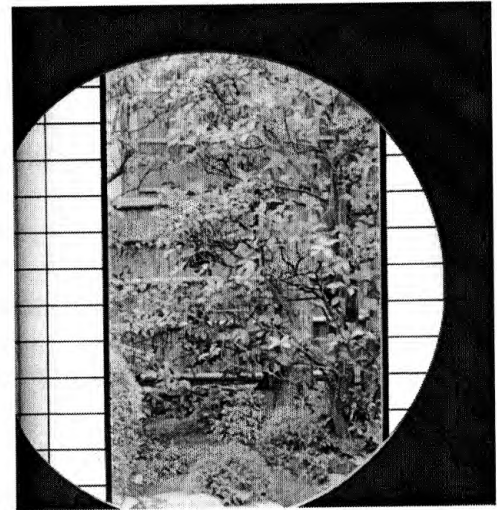
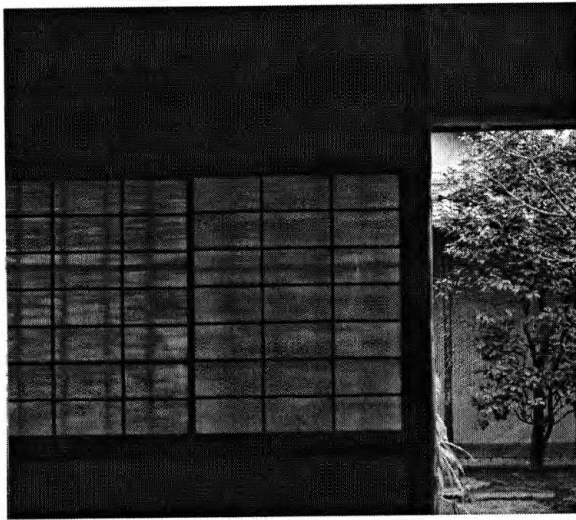


Figure 2.8 The refining of natural fragments as part of the inner space. The picture on the upper left corner shows the transparency of shoji in “isolating” raw natural elements as the play of light and shadow. The other illustrations show the technique of the “framing” of a fraction of infinite natural world and the imparting of meaning to space. The fragments of natural world are not only spatially defined, but also temporally determined.

In these connections, the indefinite boundary of shoji panel is directly responsible for the special character of space. So thin as to be practically transparent, shoji simultaneously transmits light from outside and yet block a direct view from within, thereby serving as a fine surface on which natural elements cast their profile. In favor of the appreciation of the “non-existent,” shoji isolates natural elements out of the sensible forms and transforms objects into the subtle flickering of lights and shadows (Figure 2.8). The major role of shoji is to stir the anticipation of the scenes to come, and the revelation of scenes is not immediate but gradual. With the passing of time, appearing on the paper screen are “the shadows of trees and shrubbery or perhaps the patterns created by reflections of sunlight on the garden pond” (Itoh, 1969, p.82).

When the sliding parts of shoji are opened to give an outside view, the shoji panel delicately frames a fraction of the garden (Figure 2.8), yet an area greater than the actual one is created in the contemplation of the beholder. The same scenery may also be borrowed into space in different ways of framing depending on whether the shoji is closed, partly open, or removed. For Japanese, fragments of these kinds evoke more of an imaginary space than a direct presence could do. Scenes fully articulated lose their elusive qualities and become merely prosaic, whereas fragments are intended to suggest all the more an infinite, unpredictable space. In doing so, natural elements artificially isolated or framed become symbols and signs consciously created to shape the atmosphere of space.

The fragments introduced into space are not static but undergo two kinds of time-related transformations: transformations according to changing climates, different hours of day or seasons of year and transformations according to the movement of the observer. Ultimately, transformations in time isolate scenes not as substance but as events occurring there, and the character of space is always described in a temporal flux. One scene projected into the space gradually fades away and vanishes, yet another one follows, passes, and disappears. The true nature of *sukiya* space is to be perceived in the way that it isolates the loose natural scene and condenses it artificially in a tense composition to create a new event as it exists in its organic transformations within the overall spatial void.

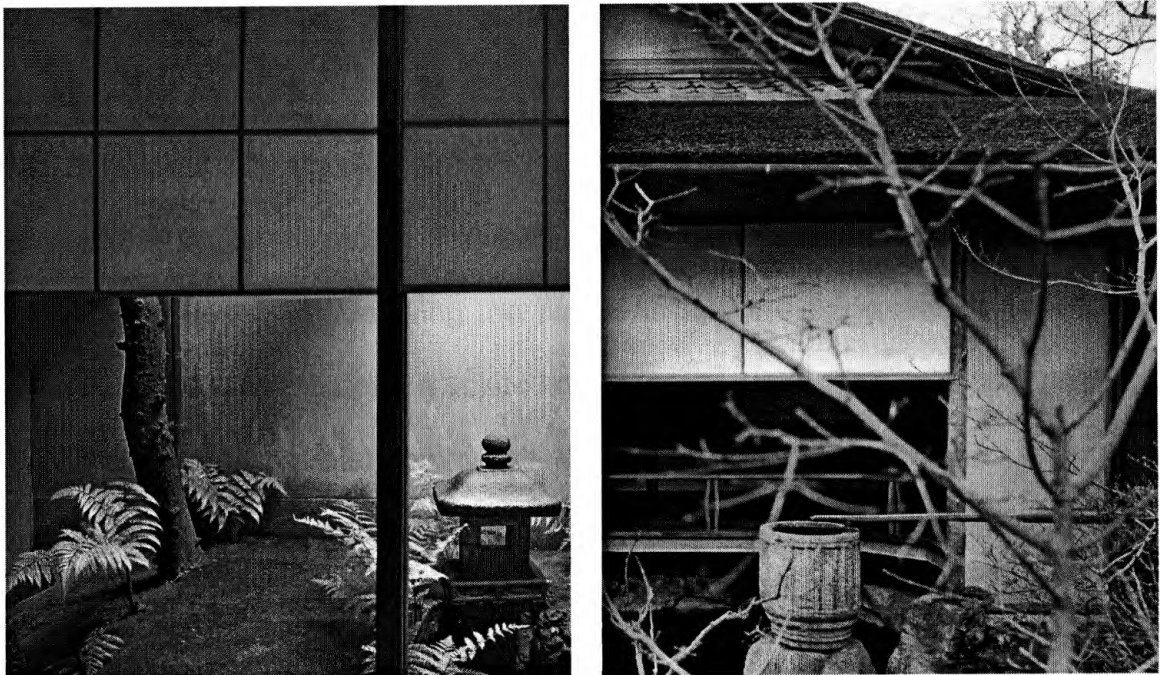


Figure 2.9 Infinite space within a limited domain. Physically, *sukiya* space is small and static, yet an imaginary space is carefully created in one's mind, which allows infinite spiritual expansiveness and the oneness of man and nature.

Physically, *sukiya* space is small and static by comparison with Western house (Figure 2.9). This dimension is based on body, sitting on tatami mats on

the floor. Experientially however, this placement of body “transcends the smallness of the spaces” and “make(s) it possible for people in them to exist in limitless mental spaces” (Ando, 1984, p.141). At the intersection of silence and emptiness, one is immersed in a meditative mood and travels into the distance of nature. And at the extreme of this meditation, one resounds with nature’s sound, and the emptiness of space unfolds the infinity of universe. As Ando claims, “The Japanese interpretation of time and aesthetic awareness are essential to the generation of spaces as condensed as those of *sukiya* buildings” (ibid., p.141).

In *sukiya* house, daily life events and activities also constitute a dispensable part in generating the experience of space. Interior partitions, *fusuma*, can be flexibly placed and freely determine the size and number of spaces to be used equally for multiple purposes, an implicit denial of functionalism.<sup>24</sup> On these occasions, space becomes the “happening” and gets a new value for certain period. For example, in religious ceremonies, the creation of an open space by removing the partitions and the performance of religious rituals temporarily transform a space into a sacred place. This multiplicity defines space not merely defined by physical form, but rather as a product of temporary activities. In these transformations, the sense of place is constantly created.

The Japanese concept of *ma*, as embodied in *sukiya* space, is not articulated by absolute geometrical patterns or material clarity of Western space. While only indefinite and fragile forms are encountered, space in Japan is rather

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<sup>24</sup> The Japanese word *ma-dori*, literally translated as “grasping the *ma*”, implies “the design not only of structural elements in space, but also of the variables arrangements for temporary uses”. See Nitschke (1993), p.56. During the overheated or humid seasons, the *fusuma* could be removed, and an open and large space is created to allow the complete ventilation and fresh air through out the entire house.



particularized by compatible fragments and events scattered or happening around. And in filling the void, they actually become symbols and signs with their significance in evoking the “non-existent” space. Already manifested in Shinto as in the form of concrete artificial things and natural objects, symbols and signs are consciously modulated in *sukiya* space in elusive, almost intangible ones of light and shadows. Roland Barthes writes the Japanese signs of this kind that “seem to divide, to classify the world into infinity, to constitute a space of pure fragments, a dusts of events which nothing... can or should coagulate, construct, direct, terminate”(Barthes, 1982, p.78). Space so created, should be perceived as an additional fabric within which fragments and events interweave and emerge in a subtle way.

Western space is understood as a physical entity of its objects and enclosures and is easily grasped through rationalized and objective perspective. A predominate reliance on visual perception exerts mastery over the fullness of space through one glance. Little remains mystic and poetic, whereas in Japan, spaces implied by elusive symbols and signs are carefully created in one's mind, and this implication is almost infinite. Space or *ma* is then understood, beyond the mere function of mind and eyes, “through a significant reliance on all the senses...as well as intuition, emotion, and memory so much that they determine or perhaps even ‘create’ the space itself” (Bognar, 1985, p.61). This approach of creating and grasping space is thereby more phenomenological than physical, and more subjective than objective. The Japanese sense of space or *ma*, as Nitschke describes, is the “mysterious atmosphere caused by the external

distribution of symbols,” and it is “the thing that takes place in the imagination of the human who experience these elements” (Nitschke, 1966, p.117).

The sense of space in relation to fragments and symbols of natural kinds has its root in the Zen idea of “One in All” and “All in One,” which denotes “an intuitive or experiential understanding of reality” (Suzuki, 1959, pp.35-36). Elsewhere, D.T. Suzuki describes this as becoming with infinity and seeing things in their suchness, which is in truth no more than “to see a world in a grain of sand, and a heaven in a wild flower” (Suzuki, 2002, p.88). The Buddhist idea teaches that the ultimate reality underlying all phenomena in the world is the Absolute Emptiness. Not merely nothingness, this Emptiness has an infinite creative potential from which all matter and forms in the phenomenal realm are derived. Therefore, to grasp the living Void is to see the concreteness of things, which themselves are manifestations of the ultimate reality. The Japanese of this time appear to have accepted this apprehension of world and to have transferred the same idea to their space consciousness. Space, so conceived as void, holds the potential to be filled by infinite fragments and events. And the idea of the fragment of the whole has its parallel in the Zen expression of *zanzan jōsui*, the “Residual Mountain” and “Excess Water.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> This idea as reflected in traditional Tea-house is discussed by Inoue. See Mitsuo Inoue, *Space in Japanese architecture* (New York: Weatherhill, 1985), p.166.

## Space of Twilight

In *sukiya* house, light is an essential element, indispensable to the shaping of the very spatiality and beauty of interior. Tanizaki summarizes the role of light in traditional Japanese house: "An empty space is marked off with plain wood and plain walls, so that the light drawn into it forms dim shadows within emptiness. There is nothing more" (Tanizaki, 1977, p.20). It is this delicate play of light and shadows that evokes a space where mystery and tranquility resides.<sup>26</sup>

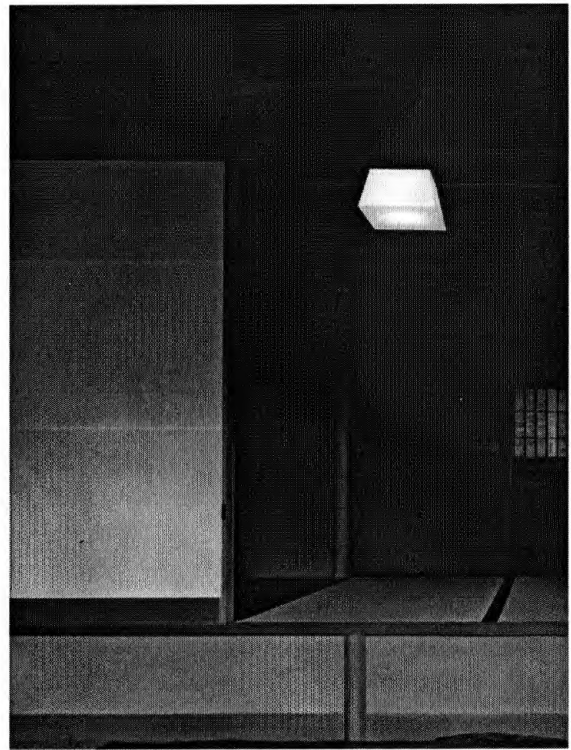
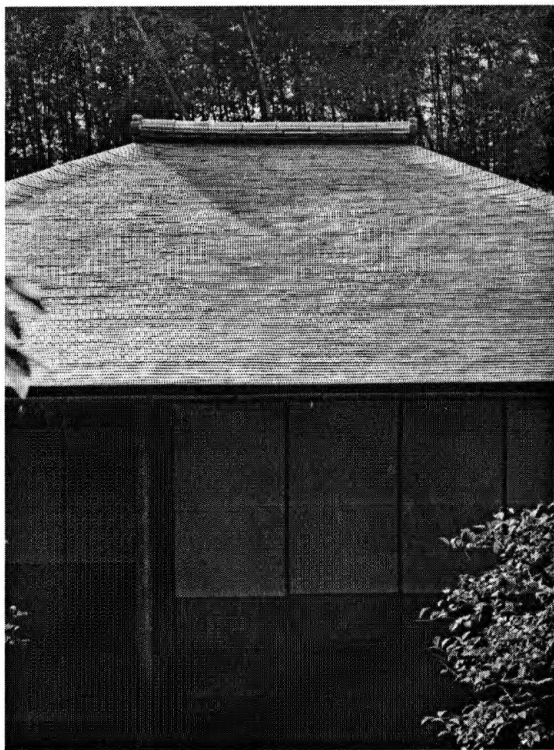


Figure 2.10 Shadow and darkness within the *en* Space. Like most traditional Japanese houses, *sukiya* space features darkness. This is first of all reflected on the outside *engawa* space. Moreover, the whole inner space is created under the heavy shadows dropped by the large roof.

<sup>26</sup> It is a natural condition in Japan that light is never felt as strong and brilliant in the whole island of Japan. Being filtered by the moist air, light is at most time delicate and subdued, giving a somewhat vaporous atmosphere and forms of soft appearance. Sensitive minds brought up in an environment like this imbibe much of it. They appreciate this mildness and cannot fail to build even delicate light in their house. See D.T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (New York: MJF Books, 1959), p.275.



The aesthetic features of the *sukiya* house are the low and deep eaves, protruding verandas, and translucent shoji panels. The ingenious combination of the three constitutes an interstitial space (*en* space) that creates heavy shadow and refines the natural light penetrating inside as shown in Figure 2.10. The sun rays from the garden side, already mingled with the light shadows at *en* space and filtered by the translucent paper-paneled screen, drain off its complexion of sensible attributes when it reaches the inner space. And it is exactly this indirect light that builds the subtle mood of house.

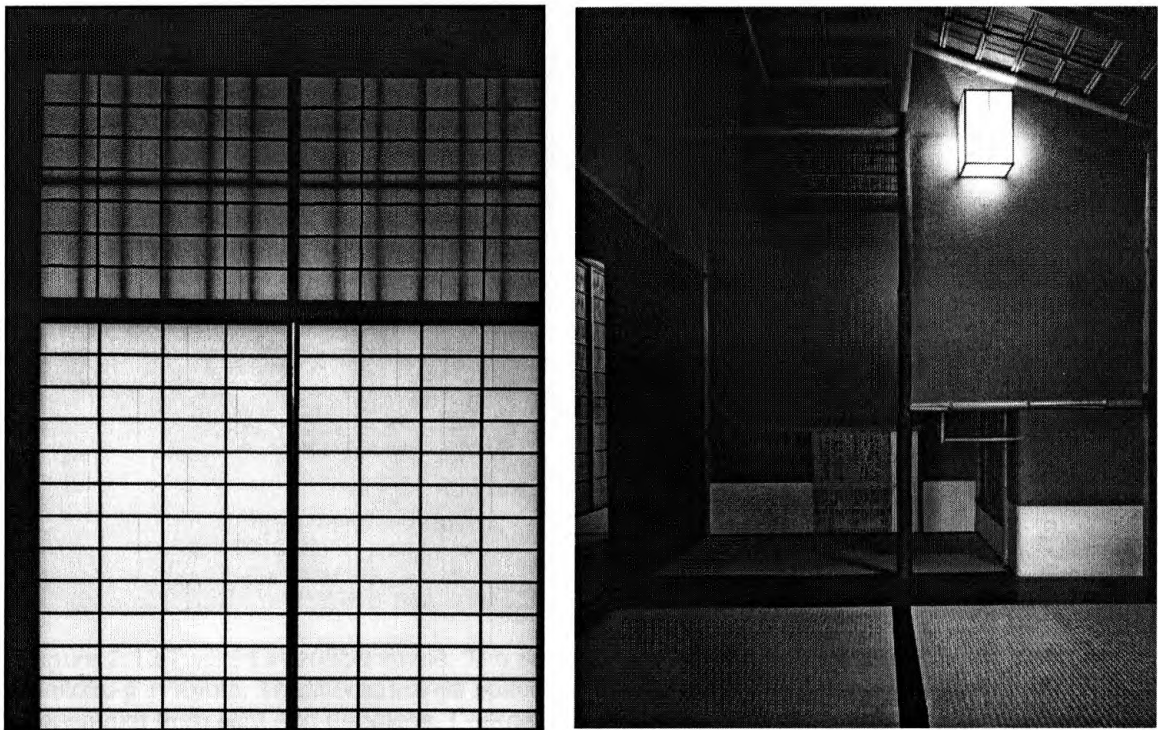


Figure 2.11 Materiality between light and darkness. The two primary materials for *sukiya* architecture is rice paper and clay as exterior and interior “wall” respectively. The picture on left shows the cold and desolate tinge clinging to the delicate shoji surface. The right one shows the surface of the fine sand clay of a neutral color embodying a variation of tonality and a continuity of shadows from light ones to dark ones.

The interior wall of *sukiya* house is made of clay textured with fine sand in a single neutral tone. The two-color of this kind neither extinguishes light nor reflects it; but allows a co-existence of pale glow and dim shadows and subtle

variations in tonality and colors, as the feeble ray fading away along the wall. Attempting to delve into the depth of the room, this twilight cannot but create more shadows, until at last it reaches the innermost place of the room (Figure 2.11). Here, at the *toko-no-ma*, the transformation of light is stilled and an immutable tranquility lies.<sup>27</sup> Light and shadows sink altogether into the absolute darkness, wherein the mystery and charm of the whole room hold sway.

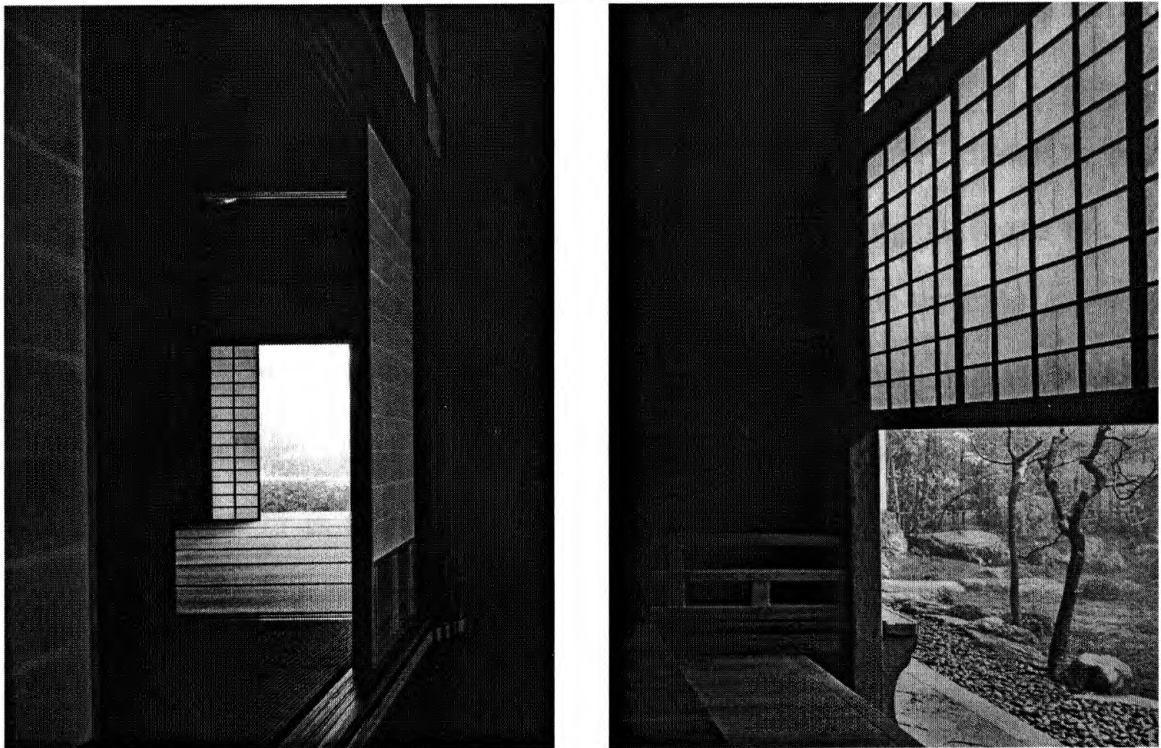


Figure 2.12 Twilight in *sukiya* space. The *sukiya* house shown in the pictures is the Koho-an of Daitoku-ji in Kyoto. Traditional *sukiya* space is in a perpetual state of twilight ranges within the continuum from light and darkness. Darkness is perceived as a substantial matter deposited in the house while light becomes an event closely associated with time dimension.

Spaces in Western architecture, characterized by Gothic or Baroque examples, are usually well illuminated. Divine light is deliberately brought down to dispel the earthly shade, and one is overwhelmed in the dramatic brilliance.

<sup>27</sup> The innermost part of the empty space is the *toko-no-ma*, the display alcove with a hanging scroll and a flower arrangement. Far from being an ornament, according to Tanizaki, the alcove rather serves “to give depth to the shadow”. Jun’ichirō Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows* (New Haven, Conn.: Leete’s Island Books, c1977), p.19.

Shining materials and fixtures are supplied to facilitate the fullness of light. On the other hand, a feature of space-making is that light and shadow are treated as opposite element canceling each other out. They are thus never mingled physically.

The Japanese sense of *ma*, however, is “maintained by absolute darkness (*yami*)” (Isozaki, 1979, p.75). Long cultural belief indicates that divinities appear and reside in the world of darkness. Architecture is thereby closely associated with the mysterious qualities of shadows and darkness, through which the spirit of the whole house and building is evoked. And in doing so, darkness and shadows are even conceived as substantial materials or tangible forms that fill the spatial void and where eternal tranquility reigns.<sup>28</sup> Light, on the other hand, is not considered as something absolute and used to fill space as the Western examples. In *sukiya* space, shafts of light unexpectedly cut through the dim shadows, and light is thus conceived equally with other natural elements as transitory events occurring within the void of darkness whereby to increase and evoke the general sense of perpetual darkness. Far from being the protagonist of space, as Isozaki writes, “light is something that flickers in the primeval substance of darkness” (Stewart, 1987, p.234). When the light disappears, space returns to darkness. In traditional Japanese architecture, space thus exists in the state of immutable twilight (Figure 2.12), the spatial continuum from light shadows to the heavy ones, a contrapuntal coexistence of light, shadows and

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<sup>28</sup> Jun'ichirō Tanizaki describes that “the darkness (that) gathers behind the crossbeam, around the flower vase, beneath the shelves...” and “the shadows...seem immobile, as if dust collected in the corners had become a part of the paper itself”. Tanizaki (1977), pp.20-21. Or “the abounding darkness –‘a pregnancy of tiny particles like fine ashes, each particle luminous as a rainbow’-was observed ultimately to emanate”. See David B. Stewart, *The Making of A Modern Japanese Architecture* (Tokyo ; New York : Kodansha International, 1987), p.234.

darkness merging with but not canceling each other, and in all, a differentiated void.<sup>29</sup> Tanizaki best likens the state of twilight to the traditional inkwash painting,” the paper-paneled shoji being the expanse where the ink is the thinnest, and the alcove where it is darkest” (Tanizaki, 1977, p.20). The charm of Japanese space is then found, not in the clear division of black and white, but in the dynamic and mutual relationship of light and darkness, and the enjoyment of delicate variations of shadows.

Once again, we recognize behind this peculiar aesthetic sensibility an underlying Buddhist attitude. The Buddhist idea *ch'i* (氣) denotes the vital energy or spirit animating all existence and is conceived as a tenuous and impalpable form pervading space.<sup>30</sup> According to Buddhist philosophy, *ch'i* condenses and disperses rhythmically, realizing all material forms, which again eventually dissolve into the eternal silence of the Absolute Emptiness.<sup>31</sup> *Ch'i* resides in emptiness. If there is no *ch'i*, emptiness becomes mere nihilism. Using it as an architectural metaphor, it is natural to conclude that this *ch'i* could be compared to the twilight. Therefore, when the twilight condenses, it becomes the substance of darkness, and when it disperses, it becomes the ephemeral light. Both light

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<sup>29</sup> As Jun'ichirō Tanizaki points out, “the beauty of a Japanese room depends on a variation of shadows, heavy shadows against light shadows – it has nothing else.” Tanizaki (1977), p.18.

<sup>30</sup> In Japanese it is also read *ki*, a term hard to translate into English. Literally, it means “gas” or “air.” The concept of *ch'i* was developed by Neo-Confucianism school in China, a school that syncretized almost all previous trends of thought including Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, and played an important role in almost all Chinese schools of natural philosophy. Later it was adopted by Japanese with Zen and exerted an immense influence on Japanese culture and art, such as calligraphy, ink-painting, and swordsmanship. For its Japanese influence, see Suzuki (1959), pp.51, 149, 159, 165. For its Chinese origin and Neo-Confucianism school, see Yu-Lan Fung, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1976), pp.266-280.

<sup>31</sup> The Buddhist metaphysical concept of Absolute Emptiness, or Great Void, is conceived as a uniform silence full of *ch'i*, which spreads, permeates, and is everything. It is described in the words of Chang Tsai: “The Great Void cannot but consist of *Ch'i*; this *Ch'i* cannot but condense to form all things; and these things cannot but become dispersed so as to form (once more) the great Void.” Fung (1976), p.280



(non-form) and darkness (form) reside and transform in the emptiness of space, which itself is the immutable tranquility. And it is true that the very twilight evokes the spatiality and spirit of traditional Japanese space.

In the passages above, the Japanese consciousness of space, or *ma*, has been described as emptiness, and their architecture reveals a total inclusion of complex or even contradictory things as light and darkness, materiality and insubstantiality, space and time. Fundamental to the connections of dualities, it is the emptiness so devoid of qualities of its own, or the absence of attributes, that permits a realm for the interrelation of these dualities in their mutable transformation or perhaps contradictory ways. The non-existent emptiness is exactly evoked by these symbols and events and is evidently an integral part of their existence. The result is that in Japan, space is treated only as a negative matter, and there is no separate existence as spatial entity. The emptiness of this kind, so familiar to the Eastern mind, is best likened to a “mirror” as it appears in the *Tsurezuregusa*: “Being without color or shape of their own, they (mirrors) reflect all manner of forms. If mirror had color and shape of their own, they would probably not reflect other things”(Yoshida, 1998, p.192).

In contrast, the Western concept of space has its root in Greek philosophy, which conceives geometry as an innate quality of space, rather than a part of the framework imposed upon by the mind. Space is thus treated positively and exists as an independent entity. In line with Western development of science and mathematics, space is reduced to an abstract concept and is subjected to

rational analysis. The notion of space thereby becomes objective and quantitative without regard to the concreteness of environment phenomena.

Having no spatial concept, the Japanese sense of *ma* is rather compared to the Western sense of “place,” since place, as Norberg-Schulz puts it, is a “total” phenomenon made up of concrete things and an essential character or atmosphere determined by these things.<sup>32</sup> The Japanese ideogram *ma*, as described in the beginning of this section, fully expresses the simultaneous awareness of the objective “given” aspect and the subjective “felt” aspect, the qualitative totalities of place, and yet is more subjective than objective, and more phenomenological than physical. In the same vein, Arata Isozaki best describes *ma* when he writes: “*Ma* is an alignment of signs. *Ma* is an empty place where all kinds of phenomena appear, pass, and disappear, where various symbols of phenomena arrangement and highly elastic forms appear.” (Isozaki, 1979, p.80).

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<sup>32</sup> As Christian Norberg-Schulz writes: (for ‘place’) We mean a totality made up of concrete things having material substance, shape, texture and colour. Together these things determine an ‘environmental character’, which is the essence of place. In general a place is given as such a character or ‘atmosphere’. Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1980, c1979), pp.6-8.

## CHAPTER 3

### MA – TIME, INTERVAL, AND FLUX

#### Time Influenced by Shintoism

For the traditional follower of Shintoism, the indigenous religion of Japan, the holy is a sanctification of both space and time. Spatially, the holy interrupts the profane space, which is the formless and chaotic space of homogeneity, and creates a center for reference; temporarily, the time taken up for ritual process is isolated from the secular time, that is, the evanescent and irreversible time leading inevitably to death, and reactualizes the primordial eternity. Through festival renewals of Shinto, the holy is manifested into the spatial-temporal structure and reenacted in temporal intervals, which interrupts the ordinary periodically and realizes the eternal return of origin.

The two most important rites of Shinto renewal, which date back to ancient times and yet is still extant in Japan, are *Shikinen Sengu* (Periodic Renewal of the Imperial Grand Shrine) and *Daijosai* (Great First Fruit Tasting Rite), which represent the worship of ancestral spirit and imperial sovereign, respectively.<sup>33</sup> Besides the significant role they play in the social and religious realm, the two rites has exerted immense influence in building the Japanese concept of time and space, which further evolved into the idea of *ma*.

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<sup>33</sup> For the details on the ritual process of *Shikinen Sengu* and *Daijosai* and their social and religious background, see Gunter Nitschke, *From Shinto to Ando: studies in architectural anthropology in Japan* (London: Academy Editions; Berlin: Ernst & Sohn; New York: Distributed to the trade in the United States of America by St. Martin's Press, 1993), pp.8-32.



*Shikinen Sengu* is the ritual act of periodically renewing the Grand Ise Shrines, the very center of Shinto religion. Each process takes eight years, and is performed in a stated interval of every twenty years. During the ceremony of renewal, a new shrine complex is built on a site adjacent to the old one, which will be dismantled after the ritual festival; hence in the last stage of the ceremony, one experiences two sets of identical shrines co-exist side by side on adjoining plots (Figure 3.1 left). The completion of *Shikinen Sengu* is implemented by transferring the sacred mirror enshrined, symbol of the divine body (*shintai*)<sup>34</sup>, from the old shrine to the new accompanied with identical worship ceremonies performed successively at each place. Through constructing the new shrine at the demolition of the old, man announces the end of the contemporary world and restores the paradisiacal earth.

The *Daijosai* is the indigenous Japanese enthronement rite the highest Shinto ritual representing the renewal of the divine monarchy. It takes place once in a reign during the following autumn after the civil ascension rite, and is closely associated with agriculture harvest ceremony. Echoing the two sacred sites in the *Shikinen Sengu*, two identical primeval lodges on two adjacent plots, the Yukiden (Hall of Purity) and Sukiden (Succeeding Hall of Purity), are temporarily constructed for the three days of ritual and are moved away immediately afterwards (Figure 3.1 right). And like Ise, during the climax of the *Daijosai*, two identical central rites temporally duplicated are performed by the new emperor at Yukiden and Sukiden respectively, separated by an ablution between the two

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<sup>34</sup> *Shintai* is the divine body of the Sun Deity, which is represented by a mirror housed at the Ise Shrine. According to traditional Japanese myth, as Nitschke notes, the imperial house is descended from Amaterasu-omikami, the 'Heavenly Shing Grand Deity' or Sun Deity for short. See Nitschke (1993), p.9.

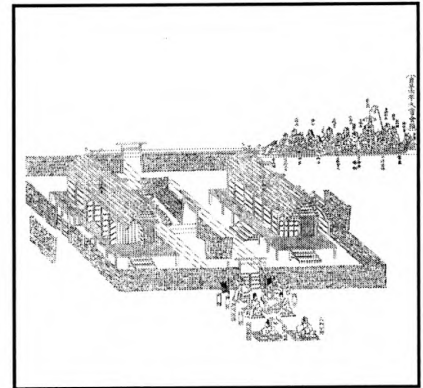
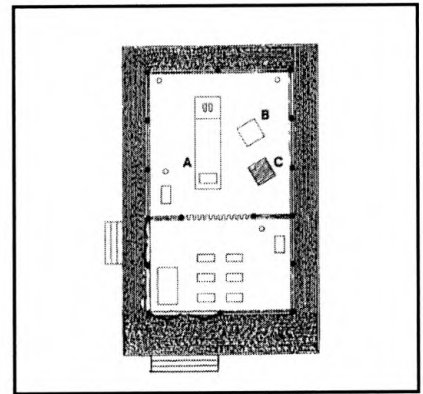
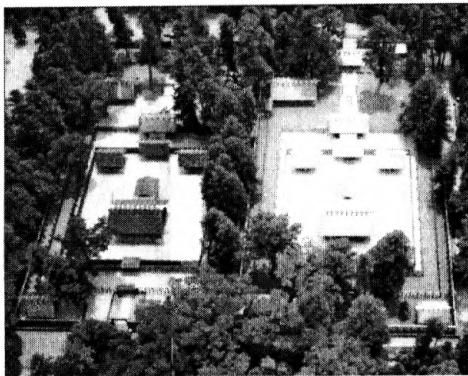
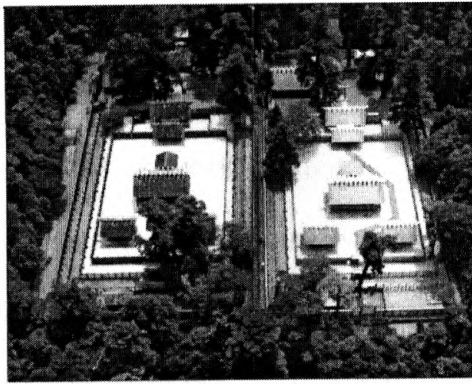


Figure 3.1 The renewal of *Shikinen Sengu* and *Daijosai*. (left) two identical spatial layout co-exist during the last stage of the renewal at Ise. (Right Above) Plan of Yukiden and Sukiden with ritual furniture. (Right below) The inner *Daijosai* Lodges in 1687.

rites. According to D. C. Holtom, “(t)he Yuki Den stands for the dwelling of the dead Emperor, (and) the Suki Den is the dwelling of the new Emperor” (Holtom, 1938, p.145). Seen in this light, it is logical to conclude that the emperor first visits the lodge of the dead, where he prays to the deity for the past and inherits the sacred regalia, and then he goes to his own lodge, where he worships the deity for establishment of the new throne. Based on the indigenous belief that the emperor is the son of the Sun Deity on earth, each enthronement of a new ruler is celebrated as a divine descendent and hence a new creation. For the same reason, the new emperor undertakes a significant role in the ritual of the Daijosai; and upon him falls the mission of renewing historical time on behalf of the whole country.

The periodic reconstruction may be ascribed to technical reasons. In Japan, wood is the basic building material. It does not outwit the ravages of time and last as long as stone, the typical Western material. However, besides this single utilitarian point of view, one can justify, from the duplication of identical spatial layout and ritual events, a mechanism for the renewal of time. Therefore, one finds in the West a historical museum of architectural relics; while in Japan, history is reserved in intangible sensibility, and the yearning for primordial model is ever given a pristine freshness.

Besides the *Shikinen Sengu* and the *Daijosai*, the only other Japanese official renewal rite was the *Sento* (Removal of the Capital), the construction of a new capital city at each enthronement of a new chief.<sup>35</sup> Yet in the previous chapter, we have discussed *Himorogi* (Figure 3.3), that is, temporarily constructing divine space by stretching a rope around four posts, a popular form of renewal adopted by folk communities on different occasions. Despite the diversity of spatial modes and ritual process, they are underlain by a coherent and unified system of renewal of time peculiar to the Japanese.

## **Renewal as the Regeneration of Cosmic Origin**

As Nitschke remarks, "Renewal is a phenomenon in time" (Nitschke, 1993, p.10). For the Shintoists, like other religious people, the renewal of time is first of all the regeneration of cosmogony. During the ritual course, a particular *kami* is

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<sup>35</sup> By the seventh century A.D. approximately, the whole capital was moved with each successive reign. This is based on the Shinto belief that a house in which death had occurred was unclean. But with the increasing urban population and the resulting centralized government, the need for a permanent location became necessary. For more information on *Sento*, see Gunter Nitschke "MA: The Japanese Sense of Place," *Architectural Design* (March 1966), pp. 124-125. Also see Botond Bogner, *Contemporary Japanese Architecture: Its Development and Challenge* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, c1985), pp. 61-63.

called down, whose descent not only guarantees the renewal of alimentary reserves and hence the restoration of life for the entire community, but more importantly, this act essentially reactualizes the primordial cosmogony, which is “the paradigmatic model for all creations” (Eliade, 1961, p.82). Through the reenactment of cosmogonic act, one thus experiences once again the time of eternal origin.

The cosmogonic origin belongs to the remote past, yet one is not required to go back in time to the beginning of the world. The seeming paradox between the past and present is resolved through the periodic renewal. In building the sanctuary, whatever be its nature, man centralizes the world and repeats the cosmogony in his construction; by participating in the ritual course in an imaginative pattern, man witnesses the primordial moment of divine manifestation and lives contemporary with the origin. Therefore, the renewal of time is equivalent to a new creation, which in addition suggests “the abolition of history” (Eliade, 1959, p.53). Time is recorded periodically with all reference to the archetypal model, by which one transcends the burden and erosion of the irreversible events. Each renewal marks the cessation of the past and resumes time from the beginning. The coincidence of primordial instant and the present moment through the repetition of cosmogony hence presupposes both the abolition of the past time and continuous regeneration of the eternal origin.

## Eternity within the Interval

Renewal is conceived as a temporal interval. The time celebrated for renewal, in which one first thanks deity for last year and then secures blessing for the next, concludes the past and prefigures the future. It thereby realizes the coexistence of past and future, as is already apparent in the dual layout of spatial representation, and constitutes a paradoxical interval that freezes the moving of ordinary time. Yet what essentially makes the interval holy, as opposed to profane, is indubitably the repetition of the mythical reality, the moment when divine first descends to earth, when all creation is in its most original state, and when oldness, sickness, and all sins are unknown. It is the moment “shrouded in mystery, far removed from the secular experiences of time,” and timelessness is in nature the distinctive quality of this moment (Tuan, 1977, p.122).

Through his construction and ritual course, man reenacts the cosmogonic act; and because in reenacting it he reactualizes it, man experiences once again the timeless origin. Perceiving the very instant at which the divine body (*shintai*) descends into the holy space and imparts the spiritual force (*chi*) to the beholder isolates and crystallizes time in a void as it exists in its short and evanescent progression. The momentary instant is fixed into timelessness. Time then is designated for the ritual renewal, be it an hour, one night, as in the case of the *Daijosai*, or even eight years, as for the *Shikinen Sengu*, generating an interval in which one is projected out of the profane time and regenerates the eternal origin. The interval suspends the flowing of the ordinary time, and “restores mythical and primordial time, ‘pure’ time, the time of the instant of the Creation” (Eliade,

1959, p.54). In all these connections, it is the void interval so devoid of secular events and realities that constitutes what the Shintoists experiences as eternity. However, it is in nature that the experience of eternity is available for the Shintoists only within a short interval cyclically checked.

In conclusion, we see that the Shintoists reject ordinary time, which is directional and ever progressive, and leads irremediably to the destination of death. Rather, time is experienced as a cyclical and repetitious one, punctuated into a series of intervals through periodical renewals. This makes possible the cosmogonic origin ever fresh and present, and thereby man associates himself periodically with the holy without allowing it becoming history. Time is thus divided into a sequence of independent but repetitious units, and each one comprises the original and eternal interval, which become the focus of reference within certain temporal period. These two important consciousnesses on time, significance, or eternity found in the temporal interval on one hand and the cognition of a nonlinear, but cyclical and repetitious, time on the other, contribute indispensably to the shaping of the peculiar Japanese sense of *ma*.

The Japanese concept of time-space is *ma*, literally translated as interval in both space and time.<sup>36</sup> The stepping-stone found in traditional Japanese stroll gardens provides a good example for the interval of this kind (Figure 3.2). *Ma* in this case denotes the interval between the stones that organizes one's process of movement. In a stroll garden, the passage is intricately punctuated at certain intervals, or *ma*, which allow one to appreciate in these void pauses the local

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<sup>36</sup> For the semantic meanings and the use of the character *ma* in traditional and modern Japanese, see Nitschke (1993), pp. 49-61.





Figure 3.2 Stepping stones on the ground of traditional stroll garden. (Left) Stepping stones in the garden before the Middle Shoin of the Katsura Villa. (Right) Stepping stones on the Rocky Shore, shown in the down left corner of the picture.

focus of scenic highlights. The words “five steps a pavilion” and “ten steps a building” describe the stroller’s movement with these intervals and the character of garden (Inoue, 1985, p.166).<sup>37</sup> Deliberately inserting these intervals along the route controls the walker’s rhythm of breath and cancels one’s sense of purposeful action of moving across spatial-temporal space. Walking purposefully from A to B gives all reference at destination, and one is made unconsciously to compress the span of space by shortening the time through speed and ease of movement. The result is that both space and time are perceived as shallow. Designing the route by rhythmically arranging intervals interrupts one’s movement. Objectively, one still proceeds from A to B with apparent awareness; subjectively, however, time and space lose their directional and progressive force. Each interval is equivalent to a happening in time, and attracts one’s awareness to the event occurring at hand. Time is thus suspended at each interval, and one

<sup>37</sup> This is from the writings of a Zen priest cited by Inoue in his discussion of Japanese stroll garden.



strides into an open and undifferentiated space. In the stroll garden so created, time and space are not measured through the physical and linear distance; rather, they are determined by one's concrete experience of the quantity and quality of these intervals inserted inside. The Japanese are ingenious in enlarging experiential space within limited size through the duration of time. *Ma*, so conceived, is the empty interval of time and space.

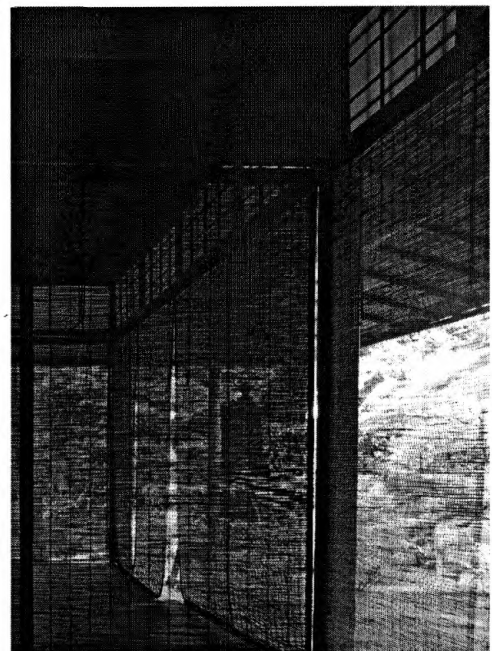
The Shintoist recognition of a cyclic time correctly accords with nature's observable and periodically repetition. In the rhythmic scene of the disappearance and reappearance of its events and phenomena, the Japanese regard nature as a model of divine origin. The repetition of things in nature is the cyclical recurrence of what has happened before, like that of man-made structure in ritual sanctification, natural events imitate the same primordial archetypes, the eternal return of *kami*. Therefore, nature becomes a hierophant, and the "laws of nature" are the manifestation of the existential mode of the divinity. This makes important two things: on the one hand, time is recorded in or even created by the repetitions of things in nature, and is thus perceived as identical with these events and phenomena; on the other hand, the repetition of things implies the ultimate reality of divine manifestation, and hence becomes an exemplary event that cast intensive awareness upon one's mind.

This cognition of time in line with the alteration and change of nature is incorporated in the concept of *ma*. In *Ma: Japanese Time-Space*, Arata Isozaki interprets *ma* in term of *utsuroi* as "the way to sense the moment of movement" (Isozaki, 1979, p.70). According to Isozaki, the term *utsuroi* refers to the instant

at which the shadow of the divine spirit emerges in the void of the sanctified space. In this relation, the primitive idea of divine descent is at the root of Japanese fondness for the time-related movement observed in the nuance and repetition of natural scenes. The flickering of shadows, the dropping of leaves, and in all, the alterations of scene depending on the time of the day, the changing climates, and the seasons of the year are the kinds of phenomena that lend to the Japanese highly cultivated aesthetic appreciation. In the eternal repetition of events, there is an attempt to isolate individual scenes from time as a current and record them as static worlds, and to crystallize consciousness at a wedge of instant and generates the peculiar Japanese eternity. “*Ma* is a void moment of waiting for this kind of change” (ibid., p.70)



Figure 3.3 The movement of natural scenes registering time. (Left) Paper-panel shoji frame and isolate natural fragments into space. (Right) Bamboo blinds replaced all shoji panel in the summer. In both case, the time-related change of nature is registered into inner space.



The repetition of things records the passage of time, whose significance imparts the ultimate reality of nature. The ecstasy with time of this kind evolves into the shaping of Japanese architecture and concretely evokes the atmosphere

of space (Figure 3.3). This is realized in the ingenious design of transparent and indefinite architectural boundary that allows the permeation of various natural events and phenomena occurring in nature world. “Appearing in this space is a flickering of shadows, a momentary shift between the world of reality and unreality”, remarks Isozaki (ibid., p.70). Space, so constructed, becomes a merely empty place generated and signified by an alignment of signs and fragments occurring in the temporal repetitions or changes. In this sense, the concept of *ma* expresses the conjunction of time and space as one reality, which is perceived in the events and phenomena of nature.

In Japan, space is therefore to be perceived and understood through a significant reliance on all the sense and imagination the perceiver, “as well as intuition, emotion, and memory so much that they determine or perhaps even ‘create’ the space itself” (Bognar, 1985, p.61). *Ma* is thus more subjective than objective, and more intuitive than rational, being close to a phenomenological way of perceiving space.

### **Time Influenced by Buddhism**

The central aim of Buddhist philosophy is to experience all particular forms in the world as manifestations of one ultimate reality. In Buddhism, this ultimate reality is the absolute Emptiness, or *Sūyatā*.<sup>38</sup> It is so called, because this underlying reality is beyond all forms and defies all description. Yet at the same time, the ultimate reality cannot be separated from the world of particulars. On

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<sup>38</sup> In the terminology of Prajñā School, *sūnyatā* (“emptiness”) is *tathatā* (“suchness”), and *sūnyatā* is *tathatā*: *sūnyatā* is the world of the Absolute, and *tathatā* is the world of particulars. See D.T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (New York MJF Books, 1959), p.36.

the contrary, it is essential that the ultimate entity manifest itself in infinite forms, which are in a process of perpetual creation, disintegration, and regeneration, transforming into one another endlessly. In the phenomenal aspect, the underlying entity is thus dynamic and transitory.

Within this context, man's apprehension of things is tightly tethered to the dimension of time, and the cognition of a mutable reality is fundamental to one's perception of the world. The Buddhist concept "transience" teaches all things in the phenomenal world are impermanent and move without constancy. A special nuance here implies that this dynamism is not simply a moving at constant speed in a single, fixed direction, but a deflected, discontinuous movement whose nature is indeterminate. All static forms, objects, lives or ideas, are merely constructs of human mind, as opposed to the dynamic reality. To reject the attachment to fixed forms and to keep moving with the flow of life is the starting point in attaining the world's truth. This dynamic world view thus contains time and changes as essential elements.

### **Time and Space as the Particularization of Event and Phenomenon**

In line with the idea of "transience" perceived in a dynamic reality, the Buddhists apprehends "things" as "an event" or "a happening" and hence denies the existence of material substance.<sup>39</sup> Thus things in the phenomenal world are not static, independent objects, but merely transitional stages of the fluid and

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<sup>39</sup> As D.T. Suzuki points out, Buddhist have conceived an object as an event and not as a thing or substance...The Buddhist conception of "things" as *samskara* (or *sankhara*), that is, as "deeds", or "events", makes it clear that Buddhist understand our experience in terms of time and movement. D.T. Suzuki, *The Essence of Buddhism* (Kyoto, Japan: Hozokan, 1968), p.55.

ever-changing reality, as a happening in time. This means that each observer can only experience the realities of things in a succession of space-time sections, that is, in a temporal sequence. Therefore, far from being a static and three-dimensional entity, the object is projected as a four-dimensional structure, and its form is understood dynamically in a state of flux. Or rather, a thing is strictly a two-dimensional facet including a sequence of time scales (there is more to say on this later). This recognition of thing as event generates man's sense of space and time. The object's apparent materiality gives an impression of the aspect of space, and its process of transforming the aspect of time, while both aspects are interpenetrated and are essential in recognizing the reality in its fullest sense. It is from this point that the Buddhist philosophy of flux exerts great influence upon the Japanese consciousness of time and space, summarized in the concept *ma*.

From the discussion above it is implied that on one hand, time and space are essentially unified; and on the other hand, the perception of this unification can not be separated from the activities of things, the events. The concept of *ma* thereby expresses the idea of time and space as one entity, which is perceived as identical with the occurring events or phenomena. This sense of time and space is not unfamiliar to the Japanese, as it is already suggested by Shintoism. Yet the previous intuitive mode is replaced here by a profound perception and consciousness of time and space, and thus both a superficial and deep resemblance could be detected between the two stages. However, this non-ontological mode of time-space cognition contrasts strongly to that of the Western world. For Westerners, time is considered as an absolute entity that



flows at an even rate and is independent of the material world. Space, on the other hand, is a separate entity, static and possessing its own geometry or mathematics laws, and is again independent of physical reality and human perception. In recognizing the reality in an indeterminate flux, the Japanese abandon fixed forms and ideas and maintain that both time and space are merely illusions projected by the human mind. Being relative and limited, they have no reality on their own and never determine abstract and eternal truth.

The concept of *ma* shows that time and space does not exist *a priori*; rather, in the words of Botond Bogнар, *ma* is the “function of the actual, pluralistic experience,” and is deeply rooted “in the sense of intangible qualities or the spirit of the elusive events and various phenomena occurring there” (Bognar, 1985, p.60). A sequence of spaces defined by events and phenomena along continuous time scales are recorded into one’s memory and transformed into a series of concrete images and signs that can be recalled later. Space so created will make more intelligible and vivid the essential nature of a place, for space merely physically and objectively defined “can never sufficiently stir the imagination so that its character and one’s experience of it become fused” (Nitschke, 1966, p.144). When one looks at a traditional Japanese tourist manual of Edo period (A.D. 1600 - 1868) (Figure 3.4), the impression of places is not recorded by a definite and abstract presentation of spaces in actual size and dimension, but by reducing them to images of events correctly happening in the relative importance and sequence of time. In Japan, *Ma* is thus deliberately created in the mind of the perceiver.



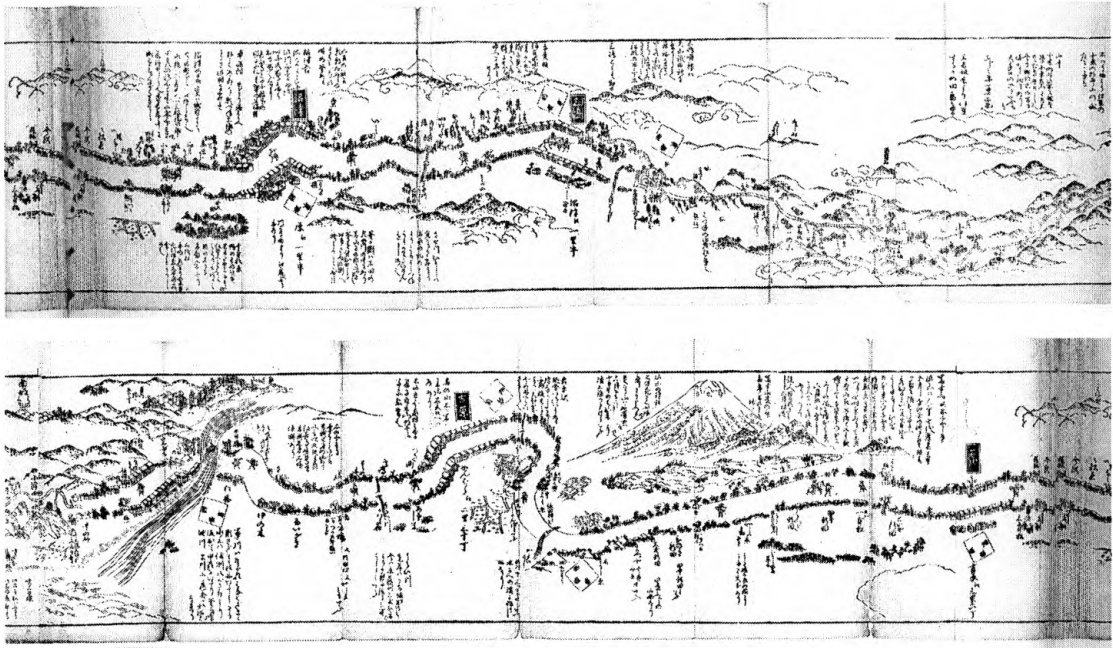


Figure 3.4 The time-structured process of spatial experience. This Traditional Japanese tourist manual in the form of Scroll Picture concretely represents the time-space concept that space is closely associated with events correctly happening in the relative importance and sequence of time.

## The Two-dimensional Entity of Time and Space

Not being perceived or created as a three-dimensional entity, *ma* is in nature constructed as a two-dimensional facet including a series of time scales. And as a matter of fact, the semantic meaning of *ma* as a dualistic unity indirectly denotes that the experience of space is equivalent to a time-structured process, and experience of time a space-structured process.

Still considering the scroll picture shown above (Figure 3.4), space is presented as a sequence of concrete events happening successively in time. Therefore, space is not to be viewed as a static whole; neither are the events depicted meant to have coexisted. Rather, as our hands unroll the picture, our eyes record the flowing of time, and space unfolds itself a bit at a time. The

picture unfailingly shows how an actual traveler experiences the space of scenic sights based on a time-structured process. This situation is quite different with that of the Western orthographic map, which dates back to ancient Greece. Maps record only parallel sightlines and abstract locations. It shows a static simultaneity of space without sequence in time, and is thereby much closer to the God's way of looking at the world. The scroll picture is comparable to the layout of stroll garden and *sukiya* architecture of the same period, representing exterior and interior "movement space" respectively.<sup>40</sup> In the Katsura Villa, a series of scenes gradually emerge and vanish one after another as one pays glance after glance while strolling along the way. Successive views in time flow is the principle upon which space of this kind is based. It is as if the whole palace is broken down into sequential planes of space-time picture unrolling to a moving viewpoint (Figure 3.5). The grasp of the whole requires a participation in space as well as duration in time.

In Western space, parts usually manifest simultaneously in their totality and a state of perfection is presented to the perceiver. In Japanese environment, however, one encounters only fragments signified by scattered signs and symbols, connected in a sequential and complementary way, always from parts towards the whole. The understanding of their mutable complexity and totality demands an "emphasis on the intimate relationship among the parts, while the whole remains an elusive matter to be conjured up in the imagination of the perceiver" (Bognar, 1985, p.70).

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<sup>40</sup> The name "Movement Space" is given by Mitsuo Inoue in contrast to the "Geometrical Space". See Mitsuo Inoue, *Space in Japanese architecture* (New York: Weatherhill, 1985), pp.138-147.

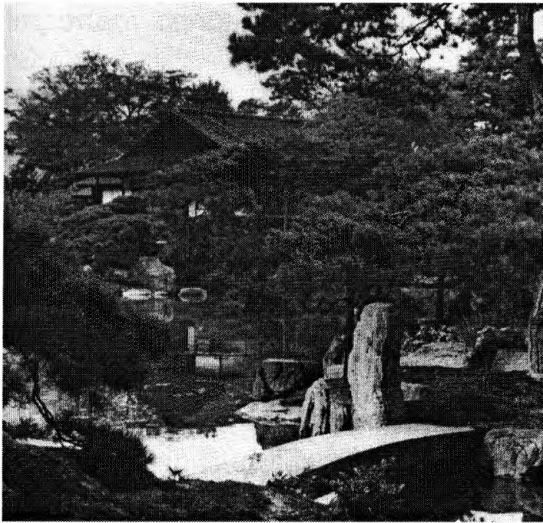


Figure 3.5 The two-dimensional quality of traditional space. (Left) The Katsura Villa embodies a planar pictorial effect in the mist and twilight of garden. (Right) The Seikoken Tea House. It shows that successive view is necessary to understand the whole, while only a fraction of house is unfolded from a fixed point of view.

Devoid of spatial quality, we rather conclude from above the pictorial quality and planar origin of Japanese space, as already implied in the two-dimensional *ma*. To construct spatial phenomena over temporal flux is a juxtaposition of successive space-time sections, and the result is that each section manifests a planar pictorial effect. This is the reason why Westerners experience Japanese architectural and urban space as two-dimension and frontal. Kisho Kurokawa, examining the Japanese cultural spirit in light of Buddhist attitudes, correctly ascribes the two-dimensionality or frontality to the attempt to “crystallize awareness out of the sensual in frozen instant of stopped time” (Kurokawa, 1988, p.62). And this denial of sensual appreciation is essentially seen in the “reduction of tangible, three-dimensional space to intangible, two-dimensional space” and the “blurred boundaries between dimensions (of time and space)” (ibid., p.62). The “instant of stopped time”, implied here by Kisho, refers to the Buddhist idea of “eternity”, which is another

important concept in shaping Japanese consciousness of space and time. To understand this better, we are once again bound to resort to the underlying Buddhist philosophy.

### **The Eternity Philosophy - Here and Now**

In earlier discussion, we have seen a dynamic conception of reality formulated in Buddhist philosophy. Yet it is worthy of note that within this thought the notion of time transcends our ordinary experience of a uniform and linear one flowing constantly ever onwards. Rather, it is in nature of the dynamism philosophy that reality is one of mutability, indeterminacy, irregularity, and uncertainty, as suggested by the Buddhist concept of “transience.” The time thus perceived is flows discontinuously at different rates and in different parts of space, denoting “an unknown world where, except for the small part before eyes, nothing can be foreseen” (Inoue, 1985, p.171). And the time consciousness of this kind is best described as “flux” or “mutability”, to borrow terms from Mitsuo Inoue (ibid., pp.170-171). Of the following two passages, the first expresses the idea of temporal flux and transitory view, while the second utters the uniform flowing of time:<sup>41</sup>

“The river never stops flowing, and the water is never the same. The bubbles that float in the pools, now disappearing, now coming into being, never last.”

Kamo no Chomei

“Time ever flows like the river, resting neither by day nor by night.”

Confucius

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<sup>41</sup> These two verses are cited by Inoue in his discussion of the Japanese transitory view of life and world. Mitsuo Inoue, *Space in Japanese architecture* (New York: Weatherhill, 1985), p.171.

The consciousness of time as flux is alien to the Western time of the Judaeo-Christian belief. Consider the Chosen People, their destination is the Kingdom of God. Earthly space is in the journey towards the ultimate goal. The present time is no more than transitional stages on the way to the future. Thus in the Western world, time is directional and ever progressive, a linear succession of instants extending to the ultimate goal, the like of which is presented in the second verse above. The goal is the stable world to be attained, and time is the intermediate stage to be transcended. Eternity, therefore, in Western “time philosophy,” lies on the end of the worldly spatial-temporal span. It is “there” and “then.” The “then” refers to a time that may be either past or future, but never denotes present.<sup>42</sup>

By comparison, Japanese have been influenced with Buddhist “eternity philosophy,” which emphasizes “here” and “now.” In Buddhism, to attain eternity is to achieve enlightenment, which is Nirvana. Nirvana is not something beyond time or birth-and-death (*samsāra*). “Nirvana is *samsāra* and *samsāra* is Nirvana” (Suzuki, 2002, p.87). However, time becomes elusive and unattainable as one attempts to transcend and catch it objectively in a serialism of past, present, and future. Therefore, eternity or Nirvana is not to be sought from the outside, but to be grasped when one resides in and flows with the time. In doing so, one actually becomes the moving and the changing, involved with the whole being in its temporal flux. “Living in the light of eternity is to get into the oneness and allness of things and to live within”, claims D.T.Suzuki (*ibid.*, p.88). Far from being

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<sup>42</sup> For this linguistic implication of tie and space, see Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and place: the perspective of experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, c1977), p.126. Also, for the comparison of the Westerner’s view on time and that of the Japanese, see Gunter Nitschke, “Time is Monet – Space is Money” in Nitschke (1993), pp.32-35.



remote, eternity thus manifests and lives in the concreteness of the dynamic reality, and is the suchness of the being, which is always “here” and “present.” All one needs here is abrupt turning or awaking, in which the experience of enlightenment takes place at an instant of “now-moment”. This is best summarized by D.T.Suzuki in the following passage (Capra, 2000, p.179):

In this spiritual world there are no time divisions such as the past, present and future; for they have contracted themselves into a single moment of the present where life quivers in its true sense...the past and the future are both rolled up in this present moment of illumination, and this present moment is not something standing still with all its contents, for it ceaselessly moves on.

The architectural parallel of this Buddhist idea is found in the mutable and dynamic spatial-temporal structure of the *sukiya* style. However, to understand this distinctive quality more clearly, let us first consider its Western counterpart, the Gothic and Baroque examples, which also present a spatial-temporal dynamism in a totally different approach.

As shown in Figure 3.6 below, both Gothic and Baroque space is characterized by a linear movement, engendered by the intelligible distance created in space. In Gothic space, this distance is presented by the directional line starting from the portal at one end towards the altar at the other; or in Baroque space, the distance by the continuous repetition of undulate forms and plastic volumes flanking along a straight line. Distance, besides its spatial dimension, implies time. In both cases the distance, with its visible depth, concretizes a directional flow of time through space. A perspective is established



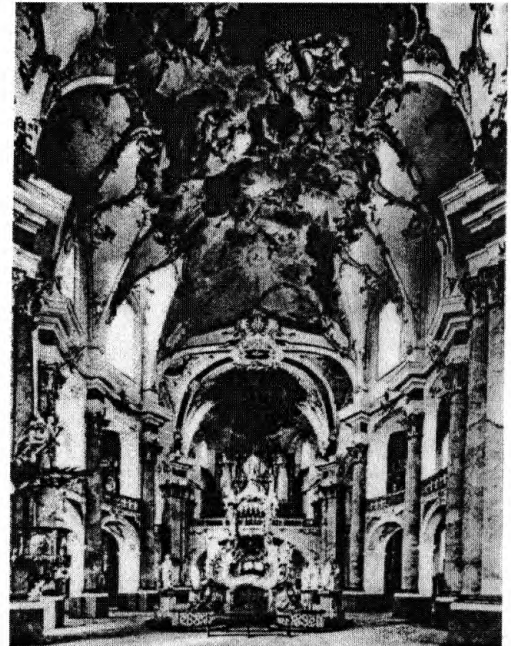


Figure 3.6 Time and space manifested in Gothic and Baroque architecture. An intelligible depth and rhythmic forms create a dynamic space representing a directional time, giving all reference to “there” (spatial) and “then” (temporally).

by rhythmic elements vanishing along the longitudinal surface and converging into a distant vista, where movement is arrested and time becomes permanence. A perceived distance thereby associates with and directs to “there” and “then,” wherein both future and past can be evoked. Eternity, symbolized by the distant vista in a one’s visual field, could be contemplated.

In *sukiya* space, by comparison, one encounters a different situation. As shown in a typical *sukiya* plan (Figure 3.7), fragmentary spaces are connected one with another in an irregular way, turning and twisting with no central axis or uniform framework. The space of this kind shows a topological quality that rejects a fixed direction or goal, and is thereby a denial of the directional time. The dynamic quality is reflected in the way the direction of the interior space and circulation, changes by ninety degrees at each turn, so as to bend and twist into a zigzag form. The image of time thus presented is not that of a shooting arrow.

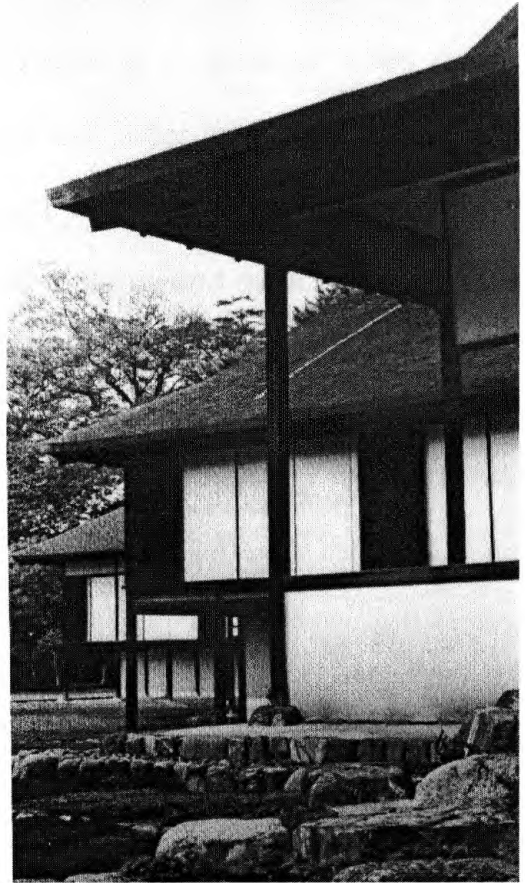
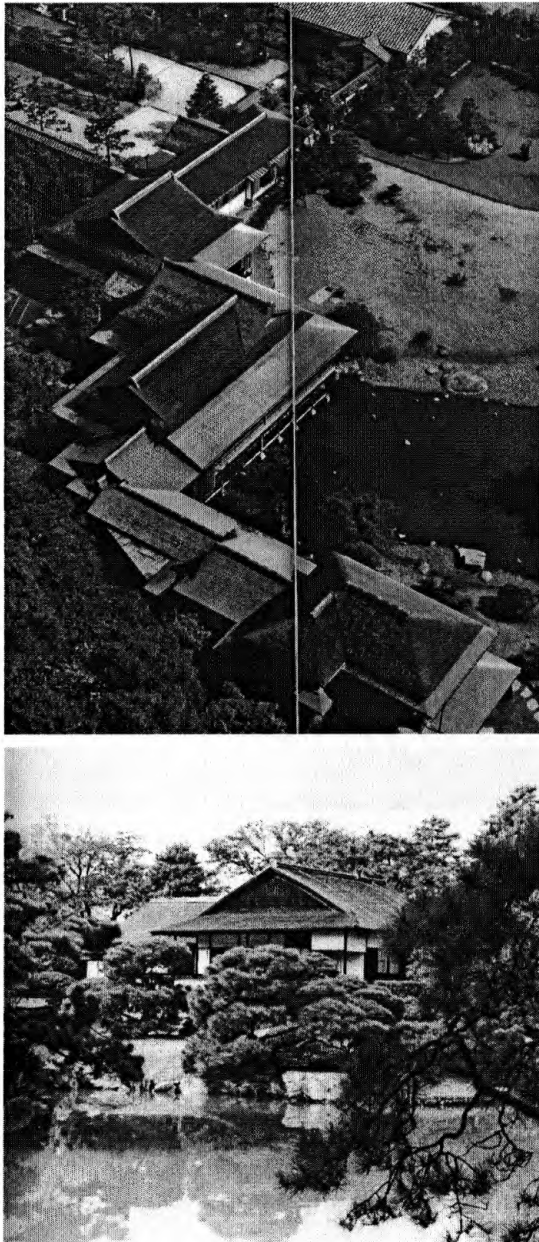


Figure 3.7 Time and space reflected in *sukiya*-style architecture. Fragmentary spaces connected in a zigzag pattern which denies a fixed, single perspective, and the related experience of time is a mutable and deflected one with focus on “here” and “now”. (Left Upper) Aerial view of Rinshun-kaku, Yokohama. (Left Below and Right) Katsura Detached Palace.

Instead, with the spatial deflection the passage of time is curved and detoured, which denies the linear serialism of past, present, and future (Figure 3.7).

Since exterior scene is always part of the interior space, one’s movement in space can be slowed down, speeded up, or suspended, as already found in the stroll garden. Therefore, it is important to realize that the lengths of time intervals, far from being a repetitious rhythm, vary from place to place according

to the distribution of local events sophisticated arranged. The suggestion of the time changing continuously in direction and flowing at different rates clearly differs from the Western concept of a uniform and linear time, as in Gothic and Baroque space. Rather, the time consciousness of this kind best describes what is experienced in Buddhist philosophy a sense mutable and dynamic reality. The concept *ma*, reflected in *sukiya* space, is in truth a temporal flux.

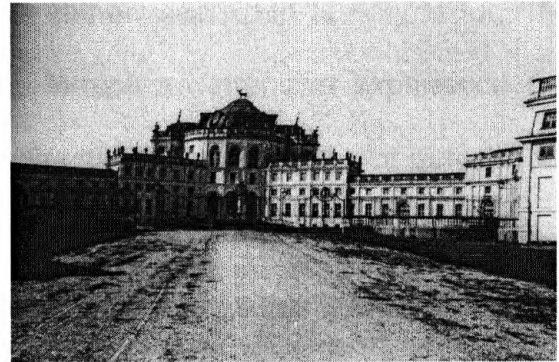
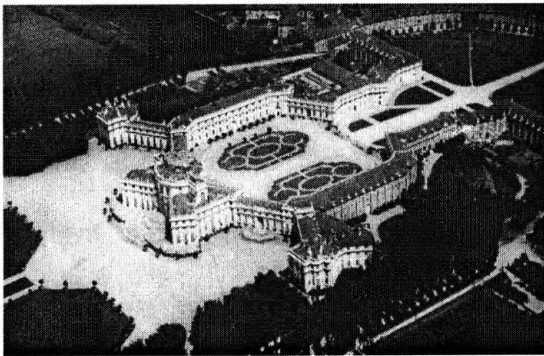


Figure 3.8 Perspective and vista of Baroque architecture. The order of space and time could be easily grasped by fixed perspectives from certain well-constructed points.  
Juvara: Palace of Stupinigi

In Gothic and Baroque space, an intelligible distance, and the perspective or vista thus created, play an important role in visualizing the concept of space and time. A predominant reliance on visual perception sets everything at a distance and establishes order and mastery over space (Figure 3.8). The overall effect of which is a significance found in “there” and “then.” In *sukiya* space, however, a number of spaces are densely scattered in a zigzag line and their relative positions are dislocated. An invisible depth remains elusive and emerges only in one’s imagination.<sup>43</sup> Yet the perceived distance, both spatial and temporal, is shallow; hence neither “there” nor “then” holds interest in one’s eyes. The whole complex postulates a succession of views in space and time, but never

<sup>43</sup> For “Invisible Depth” found in traditional Japanese architecture, see the previous chapter on the subject of *Oku*.

manifests the entire components simultaneously (Figure 3.7). Spaces of this kind defy a single, fixed perspective. And “(t)hey are characterized, not by vistas, but by the absence of vistas; walking through these rooms, a new scene is discovered at every turn and left behind at the next” (Inoue, 1985, p.145). One is made to quickly forget what lies behind, yet without being able to foresee the scene concealed ahead. The larger spatial relation is cut off so one is forced to give all reference to the place in hand. Or rather, each part is only tenuously connected to others and so composed to induce an intensive experience on “here” and “now.” The space thus created directs one’s attention, not outward to distant vista, but the current events where one’s mind could rest and achieve inner meaning in the present. Eternity, if ever completed, is this “now moment” to be grasped.

In all, we find that, on one hand, the *sukiya* architecture expresses in space and time an indeterminate dynamism that one’s continuous moving and changing with it; while on the other hand, it truly reminds one of the fact that the particulars of architectural reality is found in the present time and space, and the understanding of the whole lies in grasping the totality and intimacy of these individual parts. Therefore, it has a spiritual parallel deeply rooted in the Buddhist philosophy of “transience,” “flux,” and “eternal-now.” And the space-time consciousness manifested in *sukiya* concretely describes the Buddhist idea that the present one inhabits is in truth no less than an instant wedged at the ultimate reality in its eternal flux, and an enlightened being is that one who keeps flowing within it.



## CHAPTER 4

### **OKU – DEPTH, INVISIBLE CENTER**

#### ***Oku* In Japanese Cultural Tradition**

The Japanese sense of place is intimately associated with land. The ancient Japanese interpreted land in the imaginative pattern they evolved for the habitation of local divinity, and the sense of place was strongly colored by earth cult. According to indigenous Shinto belief, natural objects or environments, trees, boulders, forests, mountains, and so on, signified connotations of divinity, and the places where they were located were believed to be filled with divine spirit, *kami*. The local divinity constituted the spirit of site and governed the overall potential of land, to which human beings gave embodiment in built forms in such a way as to seek protection and blessing for living and dwelling.

In line with this belief, space did not exist *a priori*, in contrast to the Western notion of space as an absolute and positive entity. The Japanese sense of space was evoked by land, and was perceived as identical with the spiritual quality of place. This intuitive mode of space cognition corresponds with Martin Heidegger's remark that "Spaces receive their being from location and not from 'space' " (Heidegger, 1971, p.154). Within this context, space for traditional Japanese is far from being homogeneous; rather, locations of spirituality (*kami*) interrupt space at certain points and concretize the situations within the overall universal space. In this respect, these locations are close to what the geographer Sorre calls "singular points", which ultimately give orientation to space and

determine a heterogeneous space at large as a system of the concrete places.<sup>44</sup> The Japanese concept of these “singular points” is *oku*, and the multiple existences of “singular points” were identified as the ubiquitous sources of *oku* in natural as in urban environment. Yet as will eventually be made clear, *oku* is not to be understood as the notion of center in the Western sense, but instead, it is essentially the original point postulated in the minds of the people who observe it, and signifies the spiritual quality inherent in land. In the following, therefore, I will speak of *oku* as the Japanese sense of place deeply rooted in land, while at the same time speaking of center in a traditional Western sense, as the composition of absolute objects or symbols.

Before we attempt to characterize the concept of *oku* further, it would be helpful to analyze the etymological use of this term, and see how it has become part of Japanese daily life and what spatial implication it has. In Japanese culture, the term *Oku*(奥) implies something deep, profound, and abstract in three contexts: in Shinto religion, *oku-yama* denotes remote mountain, or mountain recesses, a sacred world beyond the ordinary inside which divine spirit is believed to dwell; in social realm, *oku-den* means hidden and esoteric secrets of art, the deep mysteries superior to surface qualities; in architecture, *oku-zashiki* is the inner parlor for the use of the household head or to entertain special guests,

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<sup>44</sup> Aldo Rossi in his book *The Architecture of the City*, defines locus as a “relation between a certain specific location and the buildings that are in it.” When locus is conceived in term of “singular points” of Sorre, it “emphasizes the conditions and qualities within undifferentiated space which are necessary for the understanding and urban artifacts” (Rossi, 1982, p.103).



a place in a house which is hidden while suggesting a powerful social position.<sup>45</sup> It should be mentioned that *oku* is always tightly tethered to the concept of *oku-yuki*, that is, depth, physically or psychologically. Ultimately, the uses of *oku* suggest the peculiar Japanese collective unconsciousness towards the innermost, deep, least perceivable but existing implicitly, with spiritual significance. In this respect, the idea of spirituality (*kami*) is at the base of Japanese expression of depth, which should be traced back to ancient time.

### ***Oku* Initiated by Shintoism**

In ancient Japan, people lived in mountains, depending on hunting and gathering. During the Yayoi era (200 B.C. – 250 A.D.), there was an important paradigm-shift in people's mode of living. The Yamato moved out to perch on mountainsides or in valleys and cultivate rice for living. This began the famous Yayoi culture and nurtured the later Japanese natural philosophy. The separation of village and mountain made the village the locus of life and endeavor and the mountain as a distinct world. Unlike those who lived on hunting and saw their environment full of danger, people based on farming perceived mountains as a wholly other dimension, which, beyond the ordinary sphere of living, is a locus of divine and ancestral spirit, to the extent that mountains and forests eventually became a forbidden realm outside the secular world and themselves as objects of worship. This natural view gave birth to the indigenous Shinto religion.

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<sup>45</sup> Part of these definitions and their implications is complied according to Fumihiko Maki's interpretation of *oku* in his essay "Japanese City Spaces and the Concept of *oku*" *The Japan Architect* (May 1979), p.53. These definitions are also translations from the Jeffrey's Japanese English Dictionary available on website: <http://linear.mv.com/cgi-bin/j-e>

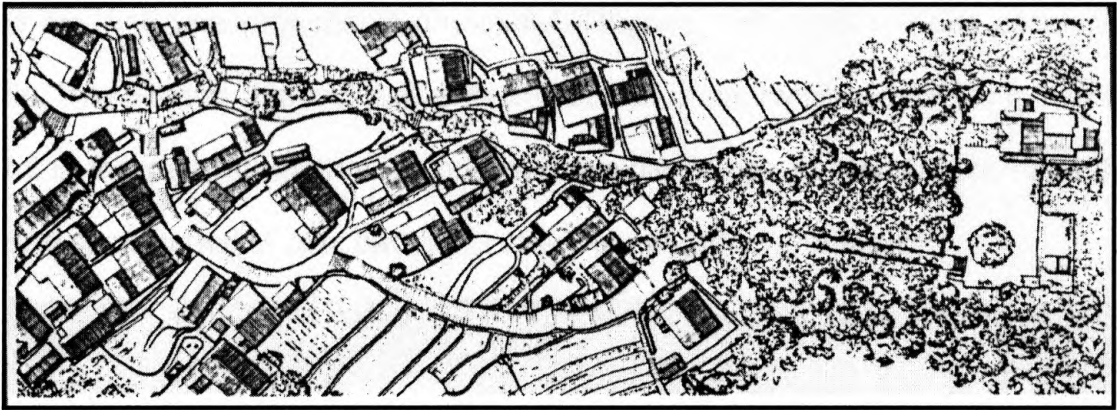


Figure 4.1 A typical schematic plan of village, mountain (*okuyama*) and shrine (*okumiya*).

According to Kisho Kurokawa, the essential Japanese agrarian landscape is characterized by the framework of the village, mountain, and rice fields, with the village overlooking the rice fields on the south, and the mountain in the background on the north side of the hamlet.<sup>46</sup> Often a religious path cuts through the hamlet and extends far back to the *okumiya* (remote shrine) concealed among the thick leaves in the *okuyama* (deeper mountain), as shown in Figure 4.1. This pattern reflects ancient people's effort to give significance to an invisible locus beyond the realm of daily activities, and this might be the first time that "the *oku* was sanctified spatially in the form of direction" (Maki, 1979, p.55).

Nevertheless, mountains are by no means the only locus of *oku* for Japanese. The pantheistic view of Shintoism expresses itself in the deification of a variety of natural objects or environment and thereby the ubiquitous sources of the *oku* (Figure 4.2). Among these multiple locations, one can detect their common qualities as confirmed by the Shinto belief that the strongest divine spirit (*kami*) is ascribed to "the least perceivable natural locations, remote and misty mountains, thick forests, various small islands of rocks and cliffs impenetrable to

<sup>46</sup> See Kisho Kurokawa. "The essential Japanese Landscape: Hill, Village, Network." in *Rediscovering Japanese Space* (New York: Weatherhill, 1988), pp. 84-91.

the eye and unapproachable physically” (Bognar, 1985, p.50). If one concludes from these cases that *oku* seeks its symbolism in an invisible depth, it is natural to find the darkest, innermost, and least visible places in architecture have the same significance of *oku*, patterned after the natural environments.

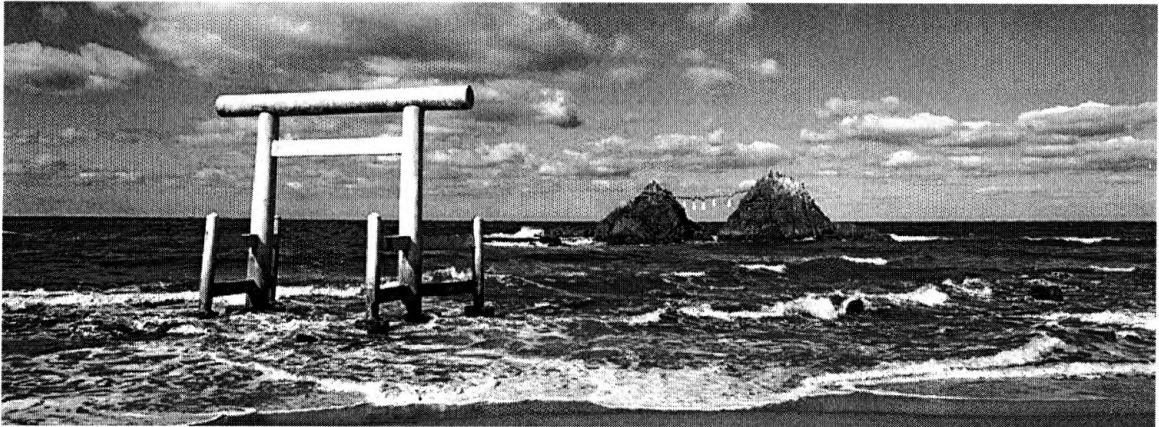


Figure 4.2 *Oku* in the depth of sea. Sea has its own depth and accommodates *oku*. The *torii* in the foreground suggests the boundary between the secular world and divine world. In the background are the “Wedded Rocks” which symbolizes the spirit of Japan’s mythological ancestral couple, Izanami and Izanagi. It is located near Futamigaura, Ise peninsula.

The cognition of spiritual quality, symbolized by the geographical, topological, and climatic conditions of the natural environment, expresses the peculiar Japanese reverence for earth spirit. This results in a sense of space ontologically dependent on nature and represented by land, rather than by concrete built forms. Architecture, as a private sanctuary, is only developed to harmonize with the natural conditions and to accommodate local divinity, and hence cannot suggest a different spatiality. It is for this strong cult of earth that Japanese have since ancient times, given less respect to the structure on land than to the land itself, and thereby shown little resistance to tearing down their dwellings.

## **Oku as Empty Center**

Westerners have always seen center as an essential urban element. This grows out of the belief that city is the comprehensive center of the world which emancipates man from the danger and chaos of nature. And through the process of building, gathering, and centralizing, men create their individual *genius loci* within the city. The archetypal buildings, church and city state, by symbolizing both spiritual and political power while at the same time exerting authority over the rest, visualize the concept of center and the idea of city (Figure 4.3). As the integration of the normal citizen life, the center should be both accessible and visible to all citizens to encounter the truth of site. The church pinnacle, thrusting upwards to heaven above all rivals, assures a predominant visual perception from any point in the city. By transferring the meaning of mountain into city location, people concretize in the form of church the universal *axis mundi*.<sup>47</sup> In other words, the church symbolizes the cosmic pillar and realizes the communication with heaven. In these connections, the notion of an absolute center is at the root of Western man's sense of place (Figure 4.4).

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<sup>47</sup> According to Christian Norberg-Schulz, mountains are the places where earth and sky meets together, and are "therefore considered 'centers' through which the *axis mundi* goes, ... a spot where one can pass from one cosmic zone to another" (Norberg-Schulz, 1980, p.25).





Figure 4.3 Church as an archetypal symbol visualizes the concept of center. The church serves as a landmark of the city, asserts its spiritual power over the rest, and symbolizes the cosmic pillar.



Figure 4.4 Center as an essential urban element in western city. The town square, main thoroughfares and church define the center, and make it both visible and accessible.



Figure 4.5 The divine Light of Gothic Cathedral. A center emphasizes verticality and creates dramatics, implying a communication between earth with heaven.

Unlike Western people, the Japanese has always maintained *genius loci* as inherent qualities of land and hence sought *oku* in horizontal depth. Mountain for Japanese is never perceived as *Mal*, for it is not the mountain summit but its invisible depth that accommodates god and evokes holiness.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, the great and powerful temple roof may give an impression of mountain top, but it is the unseen strength and the deep darkness within the roof where mysteries and spirit are pursued.

The center is identified by its verticality through concrete built form. Therefore a Gothic cathedral, with its overwhelming perpendicular scale, makes an intelligible center. Often the path leading to it is straightforward, and one is endowed with a dramatic effect at the destination. Upon entering the church, one experiences the fantastic scene as the space soaring upwards and the light pouring down through the stained-glass windows (Figure 4.5).

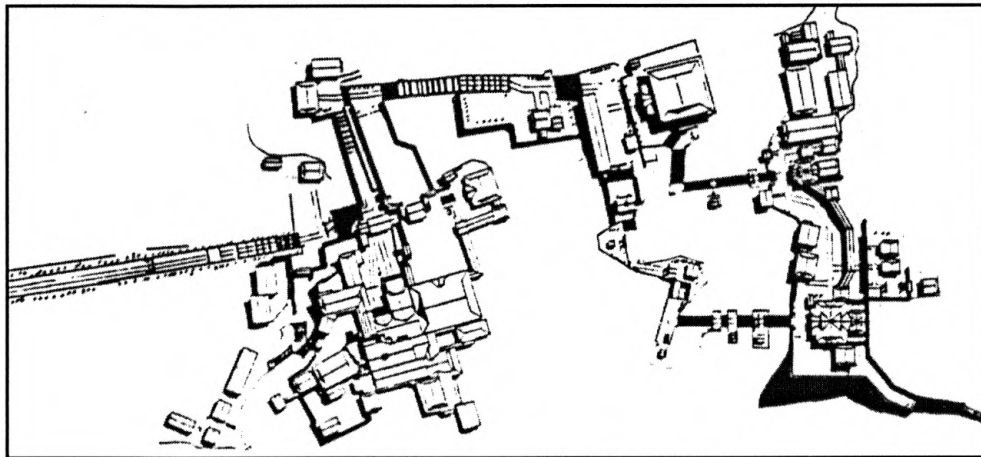


Figure 4.6 The Kompira Shrine, Shikoku. The whole shrine complex conceals in deep mountain and the ritual path follows the topography of mountain site. This composition is strongly contrasted to that shown in Figure 4.4.

<sup>48</sup> “The archetypal buildings which visualize the concept of center are the *Mal* and the enclosure, which often appear in combination. The *Mal* used by ancient civilizations was usually understood as an *axis mundi* (typically in the form of mountain)” (ibid., p.25). Often the mountain top gives the impression of the *Mal* and speaks the idea of center, hence it is manifested in the form of towers, churches, and temple roofs.



*Oku*, as the locus of earth spirit and identity of land, is the experiential place “in the minds of the people who observe or create it” (Maki, 1979, p.59). It is therefore least attainable physically and perceivable visually (Figure 4.6). Most Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples are built in deep mountains (*okuyama*), where people would not normally go, and their existence is concealed by thick leaves and fogs descending occasionally from above. They are invisible “centers,” and only the *torii*<sup>49</sup> and long path starting at the foot of mountain implies their existence, as shown in Figure 4.7.



Figure 4.7 The *torii* and the path indicating the *oku* hidden in deep Mountain. The Shikano-umi shrine at Shikanoshima-mura.

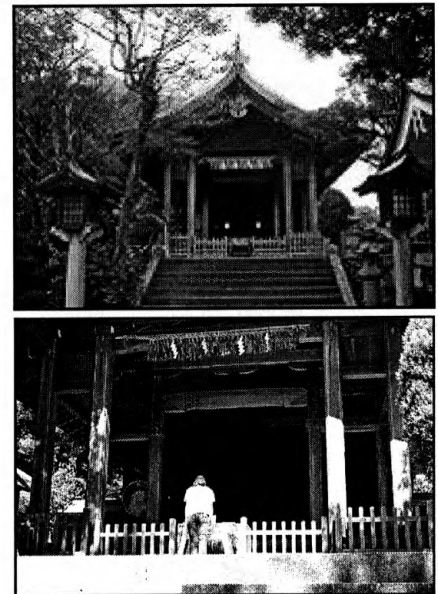


Figure 4.8 The inner shrine at Shikano-umi. Worshipers stay outside the inner sanctuary; and the *oku* hides in this forbidden area and remains in absolute darkness.

Therefore, the *oku* has no real climax or absolute destination of arrival; one rather seeks drama in approaching it and in the anticipation of encountering poetry and mystery. The path towards to the *oku* is not adjusted by any

<sup>49</sup> Shinto shrines are marked by a *torii*, or a "gateway for the gods. Entering a *torii* means the visitor "leaves the finite world and enters the infinite world." Sometimes *torii* stand at the bottom of a busy street to let passers by know there is a shrine close by. There can be two or more or even long lines leading into the main shrine.

geometrical order, but follows the natural formation of land, turning and twisting, veiling a direct view of the goal but leading one ever onwards, as shown in Figure 4.6. Far from being a linear process, the path is usually broken by successive signs and views, wherein both space and time are perceived in intervals. Along the path, there is a sense of continuous movement and enticement, always suggesting the *oku* lying beyond and awaiting discovery. Yet after all effort upon reaching the inner shrine, which is the ultimate goal of approach, the *oku* still remains forbidden and hidden (Figure 4.8). The shrine is not a space to be entered, but “the visible form of invisibility, hides the sacred ‘nothing’” (Barthes, 1982, p.32). Here there is no pull in any direction, and one is endowed with no dramatics. The experience of the whole procession is to search for the invisible depth, supported by the central emptiness; and the sense of place is in the understanding of the whole without any particular climax. Hence Maki’s remark makes sense: “the *oku* is nothing but the concept of convergence to zero” (Maki, 1979, p.59).

In summary, we see the distinction between the notion of center and *oku*: the Western notion of center puts stress on visibility, accessibility and verticality; the *oku*, by comparison, emphasizes horizontality, as something no more than an empty center, hence not attainable or visible. The difference is between creating a center in concrete and absolute form and occupying it, and assuming a singular point in the mind of beholder and pursuing its depth.

### ***Oku – Envelopment Versus Center – Demarcation***

For the hunting people in the ancient West, nature was full of terror and unknown anxieties. Therefore, to build a city that is a meaningful microcosmos while at the same time provides a refuge from the savage powers of nature, it not only is a center required, but also a demarcation from the surrounding chaos. City walls made of stone or brick are built against the outside threatening natural elements (Figure 4.9). The direct relation to nature is cut off, and city becomes an orderly domain separated from the formless milieu. Inside and outside are totally different worlds for the Westerners.



Figure 4.9 Center – Demarcation territorial structure. (Above) Solid walls separate the city from the formless milieu and against the terrors of nature; (left) a combination of city wall and moat protects the city in wars against the enemy. In both cases, there are intelligible centers inside as the truth of civilization.

The farming people in Japan, however, have since early times seen themselves as part of nature and lived in harmony with it, as influenced by both Shinto and Buddhist teachings. Nature for Japanese is both productive and benedictory, and man seeks earth spirit as an original point of their existence, for protection of inhabitation and blessing of their activities. This results in a civilization growing out of soil, that is, man's places "form part of a particular

(land), and their structure is determined by this environment” (Norberg-Schulz, 1980, p.58). Within this context, it is quite rare for Japanese to build an exact border in their territory formation.

In the “center-civilization,” people “domesticate” the earth.<sup>50</sup> The Western people create a universal order in separation natural environment, and by creating individual *genius loci* “which have their roots in other (natural) localities,” they transform “the town into a meaningful microcosmos”, while symbolizes man’s conquest of earth (ibid., p.58). The *genius loci* for Westerners are therefore manifested in concrete built forms and are more comprehensive and general to the extent that they may apply to all places (Figure 4.3).

In “*oku*-civilization,” by comparison, people adhere to the land and search its original point for *oku*. Their existential view and the effort of this kind may be described by Heidegger’s conclusion that mortals “save” the earth, and “set (earth) free into its own presencing” (1971, p.150).<sup>51</sup> For the Japanese, therefore, it is the potential of land and the spirit of a particular locality that gives order and basis to man’s territory. Yet the *oku* is something existing in one’s mind, being both physically indeterminate and visually unperceivable. So in the Japanese place-making, there is neither a requirement for demarcation between nature and man-made places nor a predominant reliance on built forms. The only need is to indicate the status of holiness and give implication to its existence. It should also

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<sup>50</sup> “Domesticate” is a term used by Christian Norberg-Schulz in his book *Genius Loci*, which denotes the “moving (of) natural forces into the settlement”, or the creating of *genius loci* “which have their roots elsewhere, and which have been moved by means of symbolization” (Norberg-Schulz, 1980, p.58).

<sup>51</sup> “Save” is a term used by Martin Heidegger in his essay “Building Dwelling Thinking” collected in *Poetry, Language, Thought*. “Mortals dwell in that they save the earth...Saving the earth does not master the earth and does not subjugate it, which is merely one step from spoliation,” interprets Heidegger(1971, p.150).

be noted that, to secure its blessing and protection, the local divinity for worship has to be contacted physically or implicitly by all members of the community. The paradox lies in communicating with something in its invisible presence, and this results in the Japanese ambiguous principle in territory formation as “to envelop this basic something” (Maki, 1979, p.61). In contrast to demarcation, the process of enveloping maintains the continuity of place, as if there were no interruption at all. It merely acts as a signifier, “giving significance to an unseen place, or to the implication that it exists” (ibid., p.55). It is for this reason that we find multiple layers of space wrapping around the invisible *oku*, producing a profound depth.

A traditional Japanese city, Kyoto, for example (Figure 4.10), has no fixed city walls as a means of demarcation. Rather, the multiple sources of *oku* “suggested by the directions of numerous shrines, temples, and detached palaces scattered around the surrounding mountains” (1979, p.61), extend far back into city interior, and cause the outward dispersion of the city framework, and the dissolution of city boundary into the remote and misty surroundings. There is no fixed center inside the city either. One rather encounters a network of narrow streets, densely built districts with multiple spatial creases wrapped in a shroud of mystery that create an invisible depth yet imply something indeterminate lying beyond and awaiting discovery, the multiple envelopes around a nominal center (Figure 4.11).

In contrast to the Western way of demarcation, enveloping is obviously a more passive act and reflects the ambiguity as well as complexity of Japanese territorial concept. Yet the Japanese have developed a rich wrapping system that



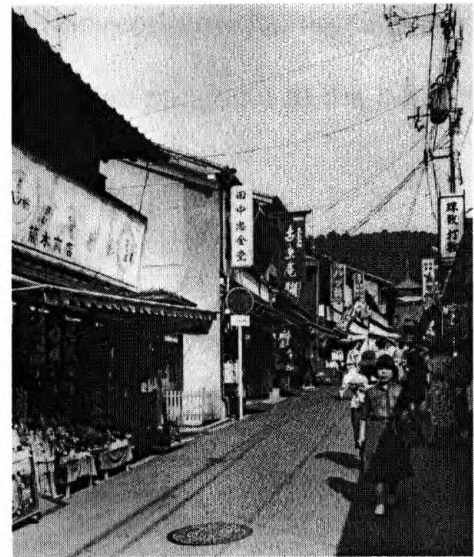
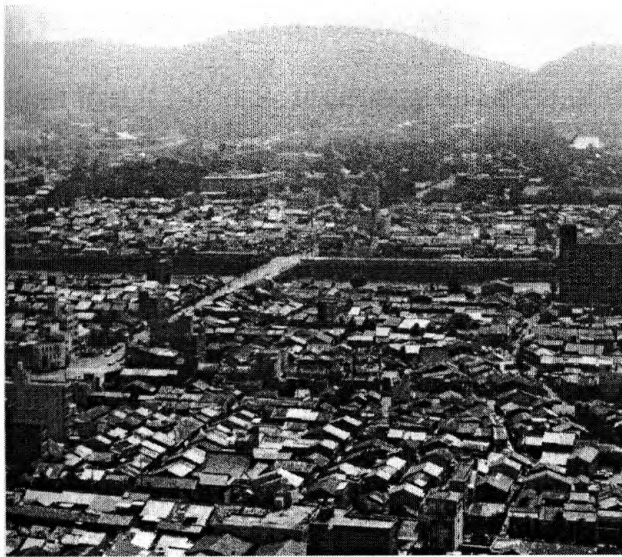


Figure 4.10 *Oku* – Envelopment territorial structure. (Left) Cityscape in eastern part of *Kyoto*. The common sources of *oku* scattered around the surrounding mountains adjust the city framework; and the agricultural units around the city periphery overlap with the city settlements and dissolve the city boundary. (Right) Streetscape in *Kyoto*'s eastern quarter. A street starts inside the city, gives view to the mountain *Mt. Otowa* and leads to the temple of *Kyomizu-zaka* district in deep mountain.

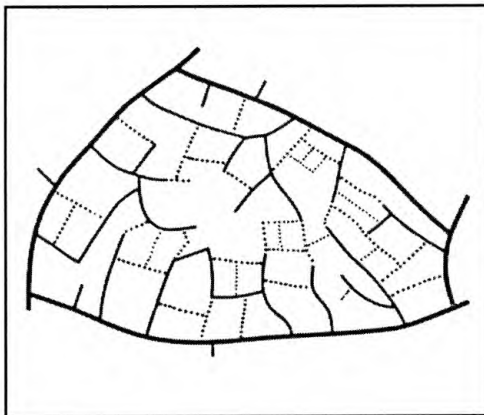


Figure 4.11 *Oku* in city district. A Tokyo uptown district suggests a nominal center – *oku* existing at the heart of the area, enveloped with a system of multiple layered spatial creases. The boundary (thick bold lines) is formed by the contours and major roads surrounding the district. Secondary roads (thin bold lines) emit from the boundary and lead inward, with minor roads added later (dotted lines).

finds its way to both utilitarian and symbolic purposes. In architecture, this kind of wrapping system is presented by fence (Figure 4.12) and paper screen, delicately and flexibly constructed to accommodate a variety of functions and enclosures. Unlike the solid walls made of stone or brick, fence and shoji constitute an ambiguous and almost invisible boundary, and “stand for an interval (that) demarcate and interrelate part and part, scene and scene” (Ando, 1984,



p.140). A traditional residence is so wrapped with several envelopments of this kind that it not only produces a feeling of depth, but also suggests at the core of these multiple layers the innermost *oku*.



Figure 4.12 The envelopment of *oku* by means of fence at Ise Shrine. (Left) Reconstructed appearance of the inner Ise Shrine in the 18<sup>th</sup>. The illustration depicts the five layers of fence wrapping around the shrine, forming a hierarchy of spaces for physical and spiritual purifications being required in approach to the central symbol of deity – the *oku*. (Right) The inner Ise shrine buildings and fences reconstructed in 1974, the sixtieth rebuilding.

In conclusion, we find the fundamental difference between West and East in their attitude towards place. The Westerners recognize space as being formless and chaotic, and therefore only built order and built forms give the sense of the absolute. Man-made place exists as a finite entity superimposed on the infinite expanse of space. A center-demarcation framework cuts off abstract space within buildings and city, being independent of natural environment.

The Japanese space cognition is deeply rooted in earth cult. Land for them is a living reality, and built forms can not exist as an independent entity. The *oku* in this view “is the point of origin identifying the land itself”, and gives order to man’s territory (1979, p.62). The inner space - envelopment structure

shows *oku* as an initial point for departure in forming territory, and the *oku* as a foothold for existence on earth.

### ***Oku* in Traditional Residence**

From the discussion above, we have seen the Japanese peculiarity in giving significance to the invisible depth of place and imaging the ubiquitous existence of the *oku*, in natural environment, city district, and later, various forms of residence. According to Fumihiko Maki, the *oku* in the dwelling “represents nothing but the special position given to inner space at a time when the concept of *oku* had become universal” (Maki, 1979, p.62). In this part, we are to examine the *oku* in one of the most typical Japanese residence, *sukiya* residence, which best represents the Japanese spatial quality.

Patterned after its counterpart in natural environment, the *oku* in architecture represents the innermost space, which is believed to be the core of the house where both space and light converges to zero. The *oku* in architecture is not defined by any geometrical rules; rather, the *oku* is a theoretical core of philosophical, psychological, or spiritual significance that is in a sense invisible and unattainable. By postulating the idea of *oku*, the Japanese develops a centripetal space structure and perceives a sense of depth through a series of gradation.

This gradation is first of all reflected in the multiple layered spaces moving centripetally from outside in. The traditional *sukiya* residence is always one with nature with the garden standing for an interval between the two, which “appears

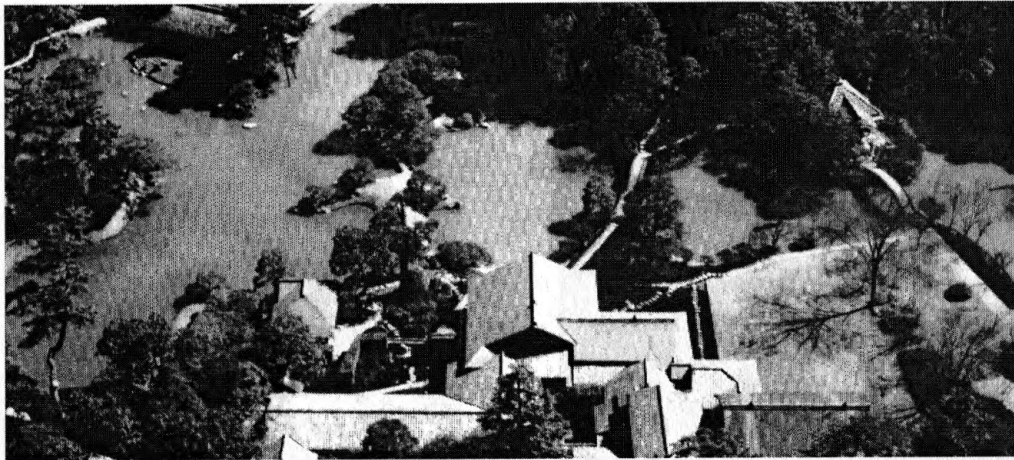


Figure 4.13 The aerial view of Katsura Detached Palace, Kyoto. The plan arrangement of sukiya style embodies a sophisticated order and organic form being oneness with the surrounding garden, which represents nature in a small scale.

on the margin of nature as macrocosm and at the limit of the house as microcosm” (Bognar, 1985, p.51), as shown in Figure 4.13. On the outer edge of the garden, one often encounters the first spatial layer in the form of fence, which delineates a territory for human inhabitation, yet extends the natural world back into man-made places. On the inner edge of the garden, which is the boundary between the garden and building, stands a second spatial layer, the *en* space (Figure 4.14), which wraps around almost the entire periphery of the house and introduces the garden space into building interior.<sup>52</sup> The *en* space is usually represented by the veranda (*engawa*) extending outwards under the overhanging roofs with translucent paper screen (*shoji*) on the inner side. It is a “gray zone” where the boundary between the garden and building is blurred and the house begins its presence. These delicately layered places, the fence, *en* space and *shoji*, do not mean to cut off or set independence from either side, as is a result of demarcation in the Western sense. Rather, these places could be understood

<sup>52</sup> About the etymological use of *En* in Japanese language and its spatial implication in traditional and contemporary Japanese architecture, see Günter Nitschke (1993), pp. 85-93.



Figure 4.14 The *en* space in *sukiya* residence. (Left) The *en* space wraps around the periphery of the house, it is the “gray zone” where the garden space and house space meet, Nishimura House. (Right) The *en* space functions as a transactional space, which orients the house towards garden and transfers the garden space into house interior, the Shugakuin Imperial detached Palace in Kyoto.

as “void” pauses inserted into the continuity of space, carefully delineating each layer of space, yet transferring space from one to the other, an act of enveloping through ambiguous boundaries.

In a similar manner, the interior space is layered by a system of paper-covered sliding partitions (*fusuma*) and sometimes portable folding screens (*biyobu*).<sup>53</sup> The multiple arrangements of these partitions create a deep spatial crease such that an outer space always wraps around another space inside (Figure 4.15). The virtue of these screens, like that of the *shoji*, lies in their flexibility, they can be added or removed in relation with one another either to divide or to merge the inner and outer layers of space. In this sense, each layer of space or partition plays the same role as the interstitial or *en* space in establishing only ambiguously defined boundaries. On one hand, the subdivision of the relatively infinite space with multiple envelopments evokes an illusion of profound depth

<sup>53</sup> It should be noted that solid and permanent dividing walls are rarely used in *sukiya* residence.



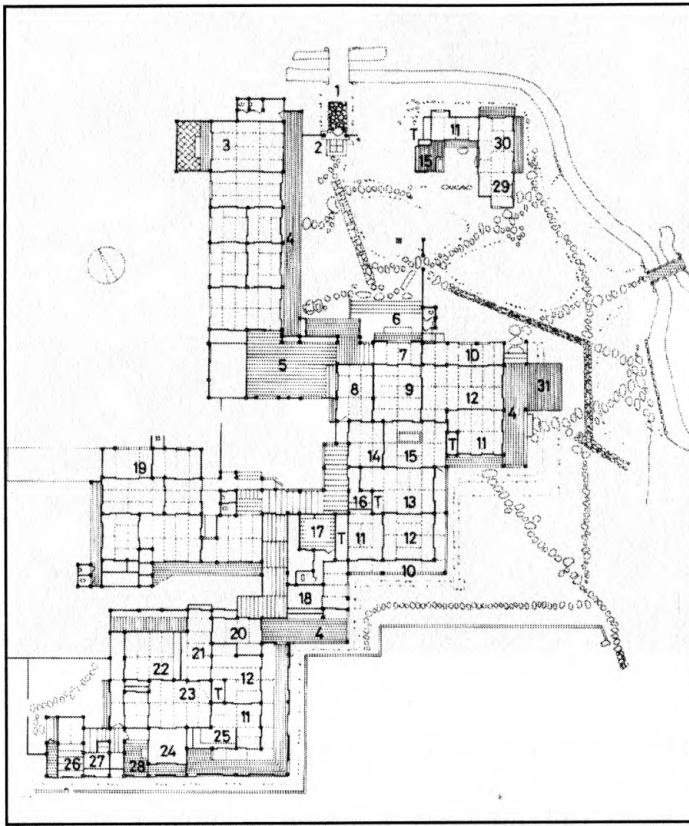


Figure 4.15 Plan of Katsura Detached Palace. The space arrangement expresses the concept of *oku* and *ma* in traditional residence. 1. Small bridge. 2. Inner gate. 3. Inner entry hall. 4. Veranda (*engawa*). 5. Old kitchen. 6. Entrance. 7. Place for the arrival of the Imperial coach (*mikoshi yose*). 8. *Shozen-no-ma*. 9. *Yari-no-ma*. 10. Veranda. 11. First room (*ichi-no-ma*). 12. Second room (*ni-no-ma*). 13. Third room (*san-no-ma*). 14. Guards' room (*tsumesho*). 15. Sunken hearth. 16. Shelves. 17. Women's bath. 18. Storage of musical instruments (*gakki-no-ma*). 19. Old offices. 20. Kitchen. 21. Pantry. 22. Cloakroom. 23. Imperial bedroom (*oyoru-ma*). 24. Dressing room. 25. Shinto altar (*kami-dano*). 26. Bathroom. 27. Sink. 28. Lavatory. 29. Anteroom. 30. Middle room (*naka-no-ma*). 31. Moon-viewing platform. T. Alcove (*took-no-ma*). (Annotation provided by Botond Bogner, 1985, p.57)

that could never be imaged from the outside; on the other hand, the interrelationships create an utter transparency to space, penetrating step by step into the interior, flowing centripetally from outside in. The combination of the two implies the existence of the innermost space, or the *oku*, which is at the core of these multiple layered spatial formations while it remains at the same time the least attainable and perceivable.

Paralleling the gradation of space from the outermost to the innermost is the fading of light from the lightness to the darkness. Despite its role in transferring space as aforementioned, the combination of *en* space and the multiple paper screens of the *sukiya* residence also constitute an ingenious device in refining the light and shaping the atmosphere of space. The light from



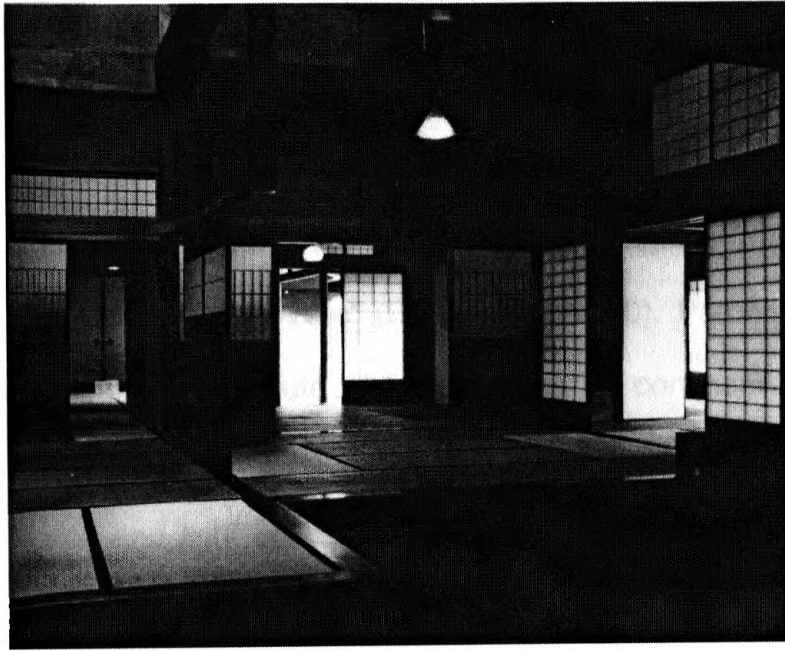


Figure 4.16 *Oku* as the innermost space maintained by darkness. *Oku* is the theoretical core of the house where light and space converges to zero. In line with Shinto belief, the darkest place accommodates the spirit of the house. Interior of the Yoshijima House in Takayama.

the garden, making its way under the eaves and through verandas, has already lost its brilliance when it reaches the shoji panel. Still penetrating onwards through the multiple translucent layers, the dim light eventually fades into a spectrum of light shadows against dark ones. At the innermost space, or the *oku*, of the house, where the sunlight never arrives, there reigns the immutable silence and absolute darkness where the world of illusion emerges (Figure 4.16). Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, in his essay *In Praise of Shadow*, ascribed the beauty and spatiality of Japanese interior to the darkness and the mysterious depth created by the shadows.<sup>54</sup> According to Shinto belief, the strongest divine spirituality (*kami*) was believed to inhabit in the world of darkness (*yami*), as opposing to the secular world of man.<sup>55</sup> In line with this belief, the perception of space is closely associated with the appreciation of mysteries hidden in darkness and shadows.

<sup>54</sup> This is presented by Jun'ichirō Tanizaki in his essay *In Praise of Shadow* (London: Cape, 1991).

<sup>55</sup> Arata Isozaki interprets this in detail in his essay "Ma: Japanese Time-Space" in *The Japan Architect* (February, 1979), p. 75.

Therefore, in a house, the innermost space or the *oku*, which is among the deepest and also darkest of the shadows, is ritualized as the locus of the divinity that protects the human's inhabiting the house and energizes the dwelling place, and meanwhile, it is the place "where space together with the beautifully filtered light converges to zero" (Bognar, 1985, 60). Parenthetically, this perception of spirituality in absolute darkness is sharply contrasted to the traditional Western divine space manifested in the Gothic light (Figure 4.5); and the darkness where space and light condense into the highest density is usually perceived as the least spatial in a Western sense. This shows that the idea of *oku* is the peculiar Japanese sense of place.

Finally, the gradation of space towards the depth is easily discerned if one views the overall arrangement as a whole. A typical *sukiya* plan could be seen as the growth of multiple space units, within each of which there are multiple layered spaces wrapping around one another. These space units further joint each other directly or are connected by the open corridor, the *en* space, "like links in a chain or beads on a string" (Inoue, 1985, 170). And from the names of the rooms, which are numbered serially from the first to the innermost one, it is logical to conclude that the whole complex is seen as a continuum of interior space as one moves through.<sup>56</sup>

In examining this kind of spatial layout, one discovers neither exact center nor fixed axis, a total denial of geometrical framework. Rather, it maintains a topological quality that ever opens to growth and change, as the order found in

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<sup>56</sup> The rooms are numbered to indicate their location in the house or their relation with one another, for example, first room (*ichinoma*), second room (*ninoma*), middle room (*nananoma*), innermost or rear room (*okunoma*) and so on.

nature. And its distinctive quality lies in the way that space is deliberately designed to unfold “alternating turns” (*oremagari*) in a zigzag pattern, bending and twisting and flowing ever onwards. The inner force is also expressed exteriorly on the overlapping roofs, as shown in Figures 4.15 and 1.17, which recede diagonally towards the main orientation and change direction by ninety degrees following each turn of the approach.

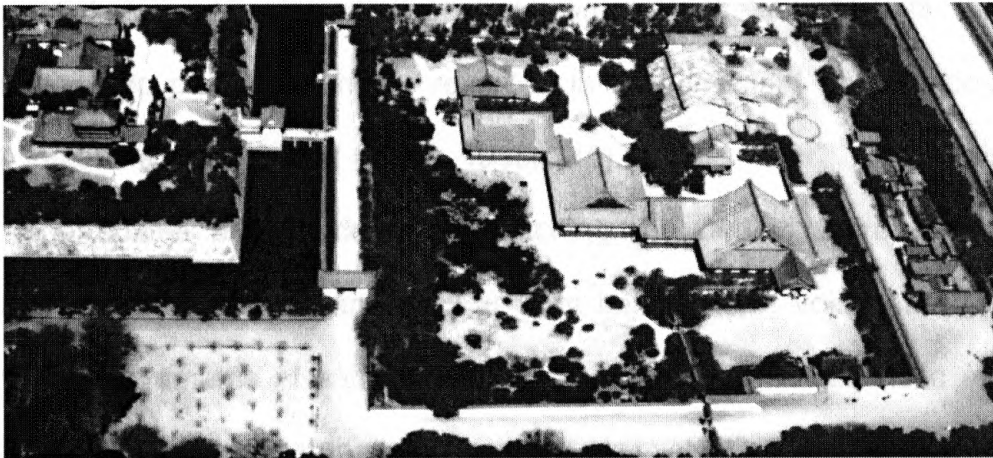


Figure 4.17 Aerial view of the Ninomaru Palace compound of Nijō Castle. The interior turning and twisting is expressed on the zigzag roof pattern, suggesting the space flowing towards the depth.

Nevertheless, consciously making a detour that could cover the shortest distance is by no means a design approach based on any rational or utilitarian consideration; behind the apparent architectural indeterminacy lies the idea of *oku* in giving depth to space and characterizing the Japanese sense of place. The carefully arranged turns are intended to prevent an overall view of space and hence create an invisible depth. As a result, space is experientially deeper than it actually is and suggests, all the more, the unseen *oku* beyond.

With the incessant turns and spatial envelopments, one's position in relation to the larger, overall spatial composition is indiscernible. One perceives

only the adjacent spatial component, yet what lies in front or behind remains hidden. The impression is indefinite depth. In contrast to the Western perspective or vista, which opens a straightforward and definite view of spatial organization (Figure 4.4), the diagonal space arrangement “rejects a fixed single, perspective (and is) accessible only from a moving pointview” (Kurokawa, 1988, p.63). A sequence of scenes alternately “hides and reveals” (*miegakure*) at each turn, and each spatial element is viewed successively as an infinite set of layers. Space is fragmented into parts and “never revealed in its full extent all at once but is shown instead a bit at a time” (Inoue, 1985, 146).

The spatial experience in approaching the *oku* is thereby delicately constructed with a time parameter. Far from being linear, void pauses isolate continuous movements at each turn or each local focus for aesthetic ecstasy. Their repetition postpones the discovery of *oku* yet stimulates anticipation. It seems as if the approach of turning and penetrating are intended not to direct in space, but to put off in time. Yet from layer to layer and turn to turn as one try to uncover the mystically enveloped something in depth, surprisingly the *oku* flees and become emptiness. Drama of space is thus sought along the way that leads to the goal, and the experience of the whole is found in the intimate relationship among parts that are recorded in the mind of the moving beholder. The overall impression is the completeness within incompleteness, since the *oku* “has no climax in itself as the ultimate destination begins to be unfolded” (Maki, 1979, p. 59). Ultimately, the *oku* is a geometrically indefinable core of the multiple spatial

layers. It is a mental point in a sense invisible and unattainable where space and light converge to zero.

### ***Oku and Ma***

Based on the discussion above, we have seen that *Ma* and *Oku* are the two prime modes of structuring space and time in traditional Japanese place making. *Oku* is an original point postulated in the human mind signifying a remote or innermost place, be it natural or man-made, and is closely linked to the sense of depth (*okuyuki*), horizontally and not vertically. Usually articulated as a sequence of spatial layers, the depth of this kind is essentially created and perceived in the sense of *ma* in the way that *Ma* acts to structure the experience of space that implies the dimension of time. Within the multiplayed structure as that of the *sukiya* house, each spatial layer acts as an interstitial space or *ma*, which simultaneously connects and separates, and determines a system of experiential places. It is from these particular places and their mutual relation that one encounters mystery and poetry, and in so doing, represents the approach to the assumed *oku*, which is essentially an invisible and unattainable zone. In other words, it is the sense of *oku* that serves to describe the inner structure of the multiplayed spatial configuration. As the sense of place, therefore, *oku* and *ma* are more subjective (imaginative) than objective (physical), and it follows that *oku* and *ma* are most likely to interrelate on the subjective aspects without the restriction of physical forms. Partly because of this, the traditional Japanese



sense of *oku* and *ma* are “opposed to the positive and absolute notions of *center* and *space* respectively” in the Western sense (Bognar, 1985, p.51).

In the following chapters, I will present these two concepts in contemporary Japanese architecture, using Tadao Ando's work as a case study. Having examined *Oku* and *Ma* in traditional space making, the purpose of this study is to show how these two traditional senses of place are consciously reinterpreted and adopted by Ando in a contemporary context.

## CHAPTER 5

### CHURCH OF THE LIGHT

#### Center and Periphery

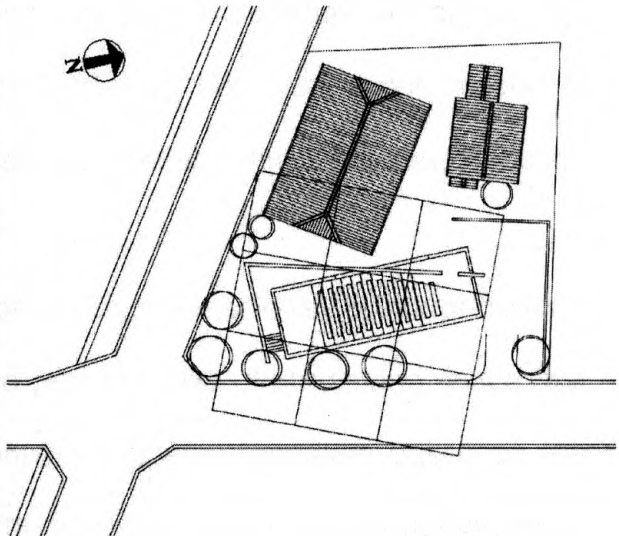
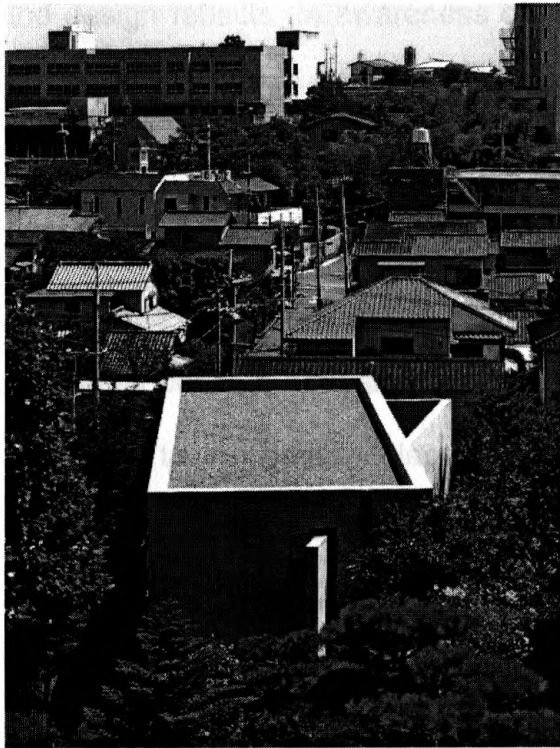


Figure 5.1 Urban context and site plan of the Church of the Light, Ibaraki, Osaka.

The Church of the Light is located at Ibaraki, Osaka, a project begun in 1987 and completed in 1989 (Figure 5.1).<sup>57</sup> Built in the chaotic and distracting conditions of a typical Japanese modern megalopolis, this work demonstrates Ando's strong commitment to a centripetal spatial layout, through which he has explored the sacred dimension within a secular realm, the spirit-oriented domain within a consumer-oriented urbanism. For Ando, the elementary meaning of existence is predicated on the tension generated between center and periphery.

<sup>57</sup> Preceding this, Ando had designed another two ecclesiastical buildings, the Chapel on Mt. Rokko in Hyogo and the Church on the Water in Hokkaido, completed in 1986 and 1988 respectively. The three buildings represent a climax of Ando's work in Japan, following his international recognition in the award of Alvar Aalto Medal.

Jackie Kestenbaum remarks on his effort: "Ando is fighting the architectural battle which has engaged architects since antiquity, and particularly since the Renaissance, that is, how to create the ideal centralized space" (Kestenbaum, 1989, p.97). Yet what makes Ando distinct from his Western counterparts is that the design reflects an awareness of traditional spatial formation techniques and an ability to wedge them in modern circumstance. For a Japanese master of space to contrive a basically Western place of worship, requires a transformation of forms and meanings.

In his search for a centralized space, Ando consciously reinterpreted the traditional concept *Oku* and *Ma*, the two prime modes of structuring space that give birth to the peculiar Japanese centripetal spatial formation based on the scheme of "inner space-envelopment," in contrast to the "center-demarcation" formation of the West. To recap, *oku* is, above all, the point of origin in identifying the spirit and orientation of place. It is an essential attribute of *oku* that emphasizes the latent quality of inner space and seeks symbolism in a horizontal depth. In spatial formation, this awareness is articulated by the centripetal structure of deep spatial layers penetrating step-by-step inwards, which implies the innermost core, or *oku*, on one hand, and enables the perception of *ma* along the periphery on the other. In previous chapters, *ma* is defined as an empty interval of spatial void and temporal flux wherein events and phenomena take place. Spatially, one could define *ma* as interstitial void or space between. In "oku-envelopment," each spatial layer acts as *ma*, which makes no clear demarcation between center and periphery as in the case of "center-

demarcation,” but rather an indefinite, gradual transition in depth. In this process, the ambiguity of *ma* that simultaneously connects and separates constitutes a meaningful void, filled with philosophical and spiritual significance.<sup>58</sup> Ultimately, *oku* and *ma* are complementary modes in traditional territory formation. And for me, this is an essential key to an understanding of Ando’s work.

In the investment of the secular realm with aspects of the sacred, Ando adopts the sense of *oku* to set the existential foothold of this architecture, and inherits from tradition the technique of space layering, which enables him to establish an introspective domain so centripetal in orientation as to resist the formless homogeneity of contemporary city. And yet it is exactly the same commitment to a multi-layered structure that also permits Ando to explore the substantial meaning of the empty space deliberately left between the centered domain and the chaotic city. In this process, the traditional concept of *ma* is reinterpreted in what he calls “sentiment-fundamental space,” the “spatial prototype” of his architecture – that is, the interstitial zones physically layered along the periphery of functional zones and spiritually directed to the fundamental levels of humanity.<sup>59</sup> In other words, the essential attribute of *ma* expressing the dual nature of existence is represented in Ando’s paradoxical rendering of the

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<sup>58</sup> *Ma* as a meaningful void could be considered in two aspects. On one hand, it is what Fumihiko Maki writes: “*Ma* or *sukima* in English is called a residue. But in a Western sense a residue is a left-over; it does not have a meaningful role in the organization of form and space, as it does for us. We appreciate meaningful void, meaningful left-over. *Ma* to some extent represents that character.” Serge Salat, *Fumihiko Maki: An Aesthetic of Fragmentation* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988), p.27. On the other hand, since *oku* represents an “empty center” that emphasizes on the process of approach and not on the ultimate destination, it is the theory of *ma* that serves to generate meanings in the process or representation of reaching the goal.

<sup>59</sup> Ando writes: “I emphasize the indefinite parts related to human emotion and to the interstitial zones between functionally space. I call this spatial prototype the *sentiment-fundamental* space. Once it has been created, I follow this procedure to sublimate it into a symbolic space... By doing this, I hope to create social meaning and mutual feeling with the user of the space on a fundamental level.” Tadao Ando, “A Wedge in Circumstance,” *The Japan Architect* (June, 1977), p.73.

empty space, being simultaneously functional/symbolic, void/substantial, and finally, central/peripheral, which opens new frontiers in symbolism and pluralism for his architecture, while at the same time rejecting every absolute dichotomy, including the Western notion of “center-demarkation.”<sup>60</sup>

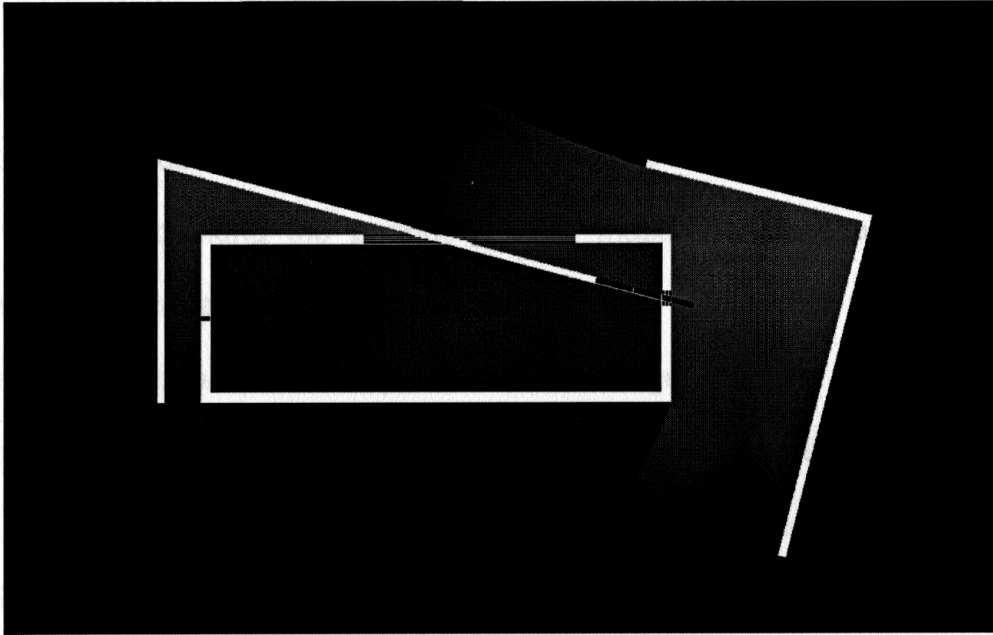


Figure 5.2 Spatial layout of the Church of the Light. The analysis diagram shows the three layers of spaces and walls in the formation of the territory.

In the Church of the Light, Ando's joint concern for the traditional sense of *ma* and *oku* is particularly at work, while at the same time he transforms them into his own method of formation. The main role in his space layering is played by concrete wall, which for Ando is the “territorial delineator.”<sup>61</sup> It is the interstitial voids generated between walls that establish the presence of the building. There are three distinctive layers of wall and interstitial space in the Church of the Light

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<sup>60</sup> In the first chapter, *ma* is described as simultaneous awareness of the dualities: form/non-form, time/space, objective-outer world/subjective-inner world. In much the same spirit, Ando attempts at the double meaning of his architecture in terms of daily-life-space/symbolic space, see Tadao Ando, “New Relationships between the Space and the Person,” *The Japan Architect* (October/November, 1977), p.44.

<sup>61</sup> Ando gives a detailed description of the role his concrete walls play in the formation of territory in his essay, “The Wall as Territorial Delineation,” *The Japan Architect* (June, 19788), pp.12-13.



(Figure 5.2 & 5.3). The first layer of wall is arranged into a rigid geometrical cuboid that defines the space of the main chapel. From this stable element, two independent, load-bearing free walls begin to disperse out and generate spatial creases that pivot around the central core. To emphasize its interstitial role, the second layer in form of a L-shape wall is arranged to interpenetrate both exterior and interior, and produce a pair of empty spaces layering the transition between inside and outside. Balancing this, a third L-shape wall is layered still a greater remove to wrap along the periphery. With these multi-layered spaces, the periphery penetrates into the core step-by-step, giving rise to a centripetal structure, where spaces envelop around and merge with one another in depth, evoking the sense of *oku* at the innermost core. At the same time, the ubiquitous voids within the structure, in the form of leftover interstices and overlapping transitions between layers, are assigned substantial meanings and sublimated into Ando's "sentiment-fundamental space", implying the sense of *ma*. The structure of the space layering is formulated in Figure 5.3 below. These peripheral or interstitial spaces are thereby equally as value-charged, if not more than, the principal space. Thus, by resorting to the traditional concept of *ma* and *oku*, Ando has produced in the Church of the Light a unique non-Western pattern, and in so doing freed the hierarchical nature and axial direction of traditional Christian space. In virtue of these spatial layers, the whole building is perceived not so much as volumes or forms but as highly structured voids. While each one preserves its own individuality, they remain mutually dependent so as to

constitute a coherent centripetal syntax. It is their distinctive meanings within the territorial context that I would like to examine in the following.

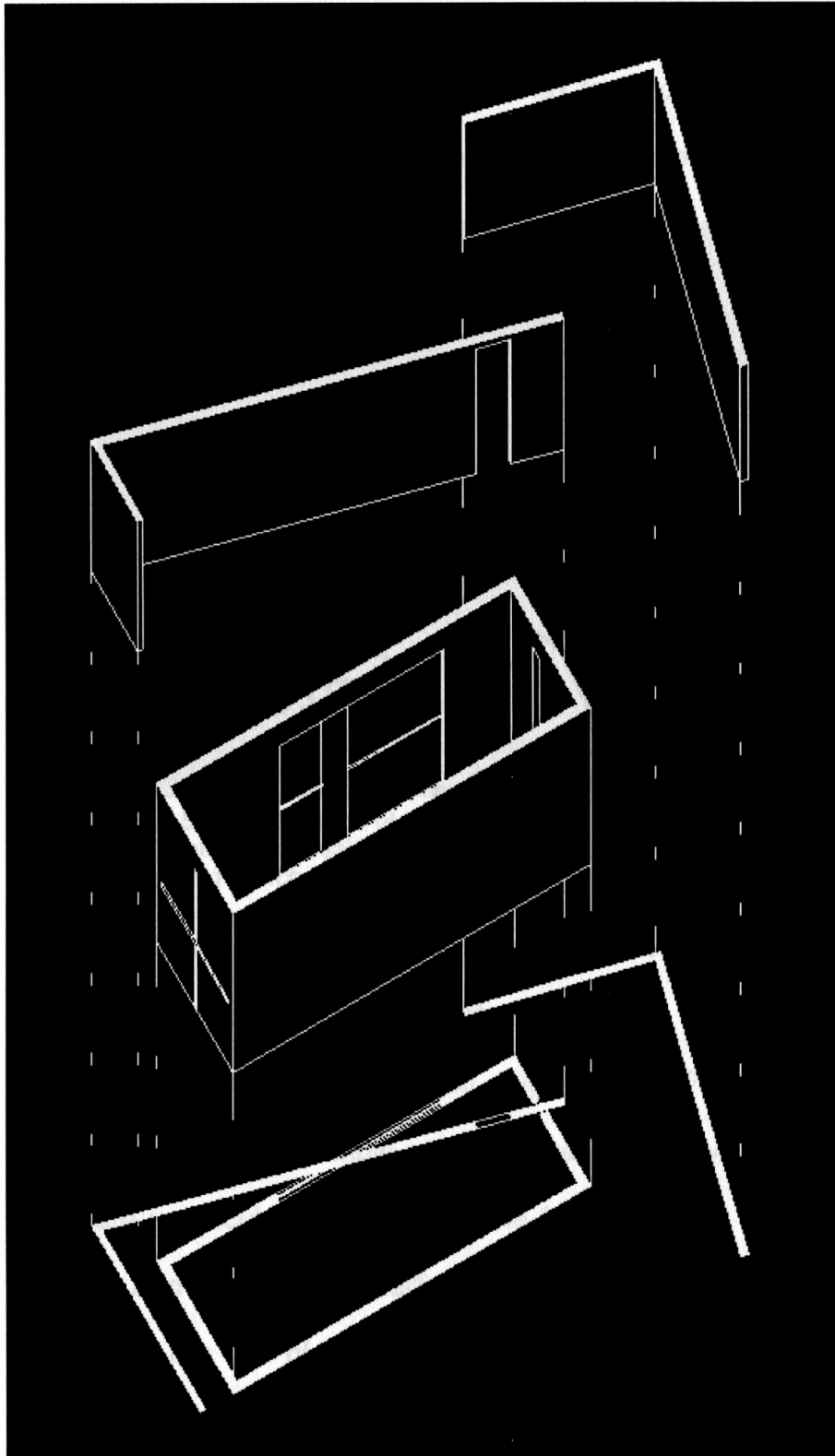


Figure 5.3 The structure of space layering in the Church of the Light. The diagram shows that the wall is a principal element in the formation of spatial layout, while at the same time, the resultant building is transformed into highly structured voids

The site for the building is located in a dense residential suburb in northeast Osaka, on the corner of two adjacent streets planted with pine trees. The Church of the Light is a functioning Christian church serving the local Ibaraki community, and it is a freestanding annex to an old church and vicarage, made of wood construction, on the western part of the site (Figure 5.1 & 5.4).



Figure 5.4 Site condition of the Church of the Light. The site is in a residential suburb at Ibaraki, Osaka. To the west (left in the figure) of the building, there is an existing church and pastor's house within the site.

Responding to the existing situation, the essential role of the first layer is to isolate the chapel space out of the adjacent profane chaos and define a microcosmic world for the sacred (Figure 5.5). For this purpose, Ando has inserted into the site a triple-cube volume of massive walls. All that faces the street are unarticulated, stark concrete facades so as to shut out the city lying behind it and reject any immediate relationship between the two (Figure 5.6). In contrast to this act of denial, Ando audaciously inscribed two horizontal and vertical glazed slots on the south facade to let radiating light penetrate behind the

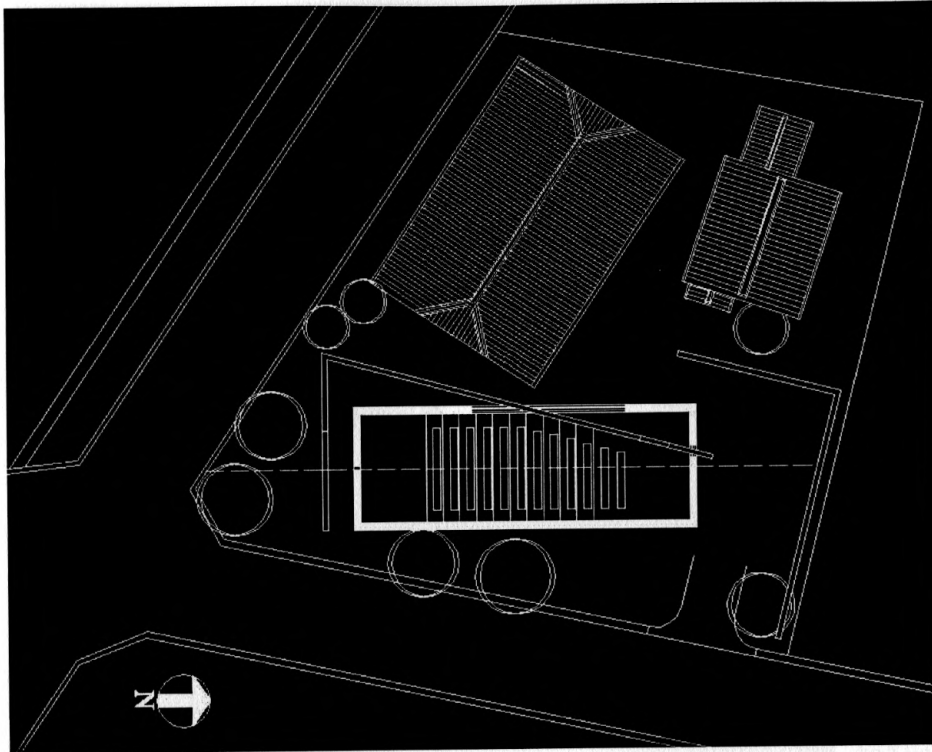


Figure 5.5 The first layer of wall/space of the centripetal spatial formation in the Church of the Light.

altar; in so doing, Ando assumed a contradictory approach to traditional Christian church, which always conceals the chief crucifix inside the altar (Figure 5.7). Furthermore, the longitude axis of the cubic volume is adjusted toward the south in such a way as to confront the cruciform void with the full trajectory of the sun. In the combination of the two, the chapel specifies a cosmic axis, which neither terminates within the altar end nor ascends towards heaven as an *axis mundi*, as in case of Gothic spaces, but extends horizontally through the cruciform void and dissolves outward into a remote, indefinite place somewhere. By doing this, Ando has evoked an entirely other sense of spirituality, which does not give absoluteness to the man-made symbol, but unfolds its symbolism in an invisible depth, speaking the connotation of *oku*. This design gesture has a cultural parallel in Japanese city formation: whereas a Western city possesses its own

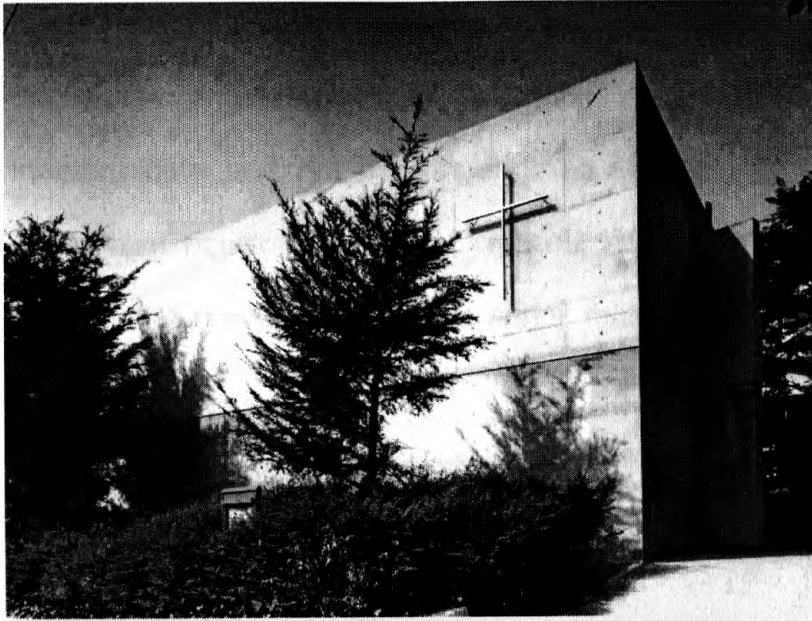


Figure 5.6 Eastern facade of the Church of the Light. A stark concrete facades shuts the city lying behind it, and reject any immediate relationship between the two

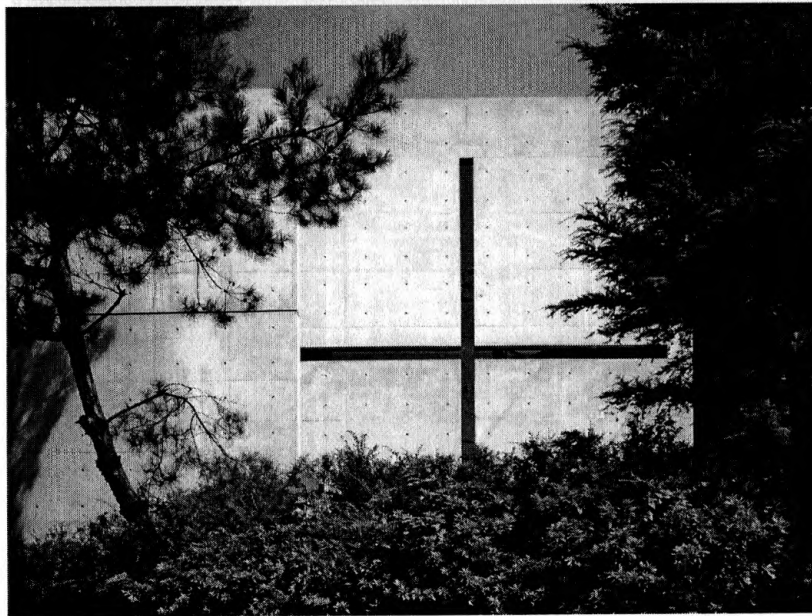


Figure 5.7 Southern facade of the Church of the Light. two horizontal and vertical glazed slots are inscribed on the south facade to let radiating light penetrate behind the altar

*genius loci*, which is determined by what is visualized, symbolized, or gathered, as a translocating of forms rooted in natural localities, a common *oku* for the Japanese city is implied by the directions of numerous shrines scattered around natural settings, resulting in an disappearance of central focus and an outward



dispersion of city into its misty surroundings.<sup>62</sup> In much the same manner, Ando seeks the original point of existence in land by reference to something indeterminate and not by reference to a fixed center. Therefore, despite its centralized position within the physical spatial layout, the chapel conveys an experiential reality of *oku-ness* rather than centrality; in other words, it is an “empty center.”

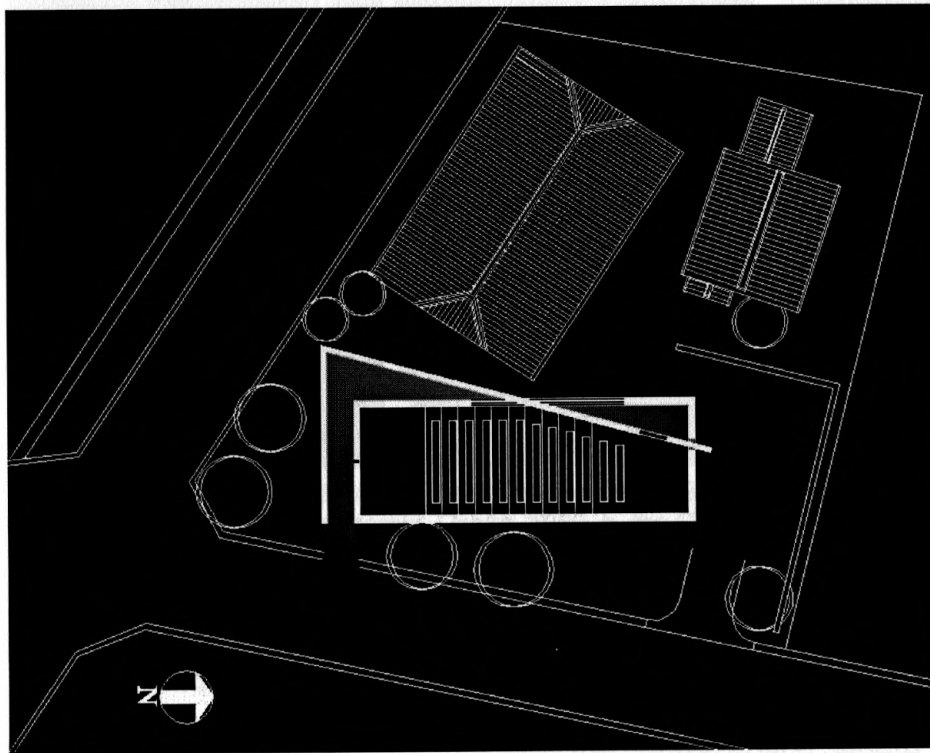


Figure 5.8 The second layer of wall/space of the centripetal spatial formation in the Church of the Light.

Around the main chapel, the second layer in the form of a L-shape wall pivots out (Figure 5.8). The L-shaped wall of this kind could be identified as an essential element in layering space common to all Ando's three churches, yet in

<sup>62</sup> With regard to the Western idea of *genius loci*, Borberge-Schulz writes: “In the urban dwelling and the town as a whole, instead, the direct relation to the natural environment is weakened or almost lost, and gathering becomes a bringing together of forms which have their roots in other localities. Through building, man-made places are created which possess their individual *genius loci*. This genius is determined by what is visualized, complemented, symbolized and gathered.” Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1980, c1979). P.58.

this case, it is more involved and complex (Figure 5.9). Here, a freestanding diagonal wall bisects the west side of the concrete cuboid at an angle of 15 degrees and exits through its end wall on the north. This wall hooks back on itself and envelops a section of the altar elevation from the adjacent street (Figure 5.10). Ando has deliberately introduced a shift by way of the diagonal wall to

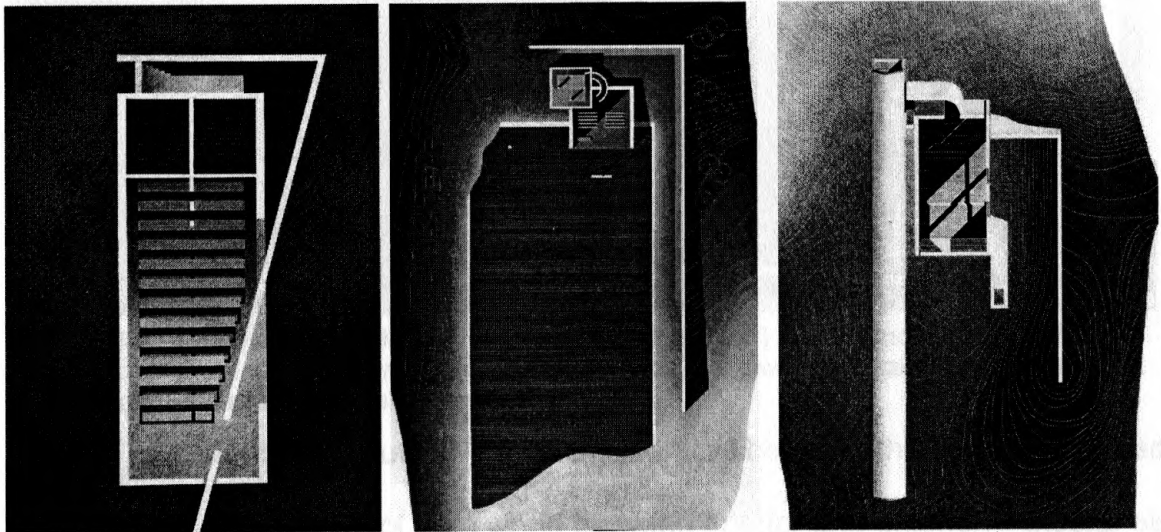


Figure 5.9 The L-shaped wall in Ando's three ecclesiastical buildings. (From Left to Right) a. the Church of the Light in Ibaraki, Osaka, 1989. b. the Church on Water, Tomamu, Hokkaido, 1988. c. Chapel On Mt. Rokko, in Kobe, Hyogo, 1986.

deviate from the uniform orthogonal system of the central core. In virtue of this collision, Ando made possible two things: on the one hand, peripheral space envelops, penetrates, and merges with the central space, where the exterior, with its beautifully filtered light, converges to zero, evoking the sense of *oku*. The absolute demarcation between inside and outside is rejected, while tension thus maintained becomes relative and complex. On the other hand, Ando transformed the traditional Christian space of single longitudinal axis, where two formal systems collide harshly, and interstitial voids, charged with potential, emerge.



Figure 5.10 The L-shaped wall in the Church of the Light. (Left) The exterior section of the L-shaped wall envelops a section of the altar. (Right) The same wall penetrates into chapel interior and exists at the rear end.

The essential attribute of the void generated between the two systems lies in its ambiguity, as a sort of third world between interior and exterior.<sup>63</sup> Insofar as it sits in the shelter of the roof, it may be considered interior space, but since it is separated from the chapel body and opens to the outside, it is also part of exterior space. Yet the ambiguity of this kind constitutes for Ando not only a physical gap, but also a metaphysical gap between the “fundamental” and “sentiment,” wherein substantial meaning dwells.<sup>64</sup> The interstitial void serves as the entry hall, which in fact turns out to be a “vestigial” approach to the chapel (Figure 5.11). Upon entering this space, one’s access is abruptly terminated in a

<sup>63</sup> A pair of voids is generated by the oblique wall and the cubic volume. I will discuss the one inside the chapel in the following, and discuss the other one in terms of Ando’s “abstracted nature” in next part.

<sup>64</sup> Ando alludes to his “*sentiment-fundamental space*” and claims: “I believe in removing architecture from function after ensuring the observation of functional basics. In other words, I like to see how far architecture can pursue function and then, after the pursuit has been made, to see how far architecture can be removed from function. The significance of architecture is found in the distance between it and function.” Tadao Ando, “The Emotionally Made Architectural Space of Tadao Ando,” *The Japan Architect* (April, 1980), p.45-46.

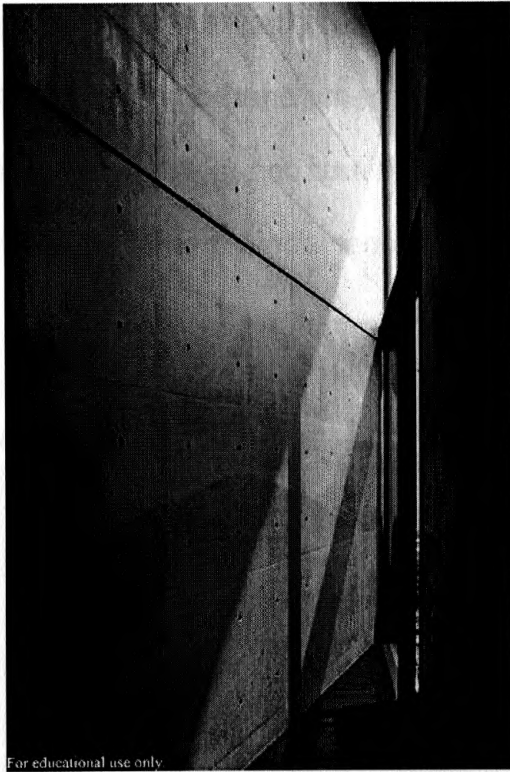


Figure 5.11 The entrance hall of the Church of the Light. (left) The narrow “vestigial” approach to the chapel. (right) the second gate to the chapel space. The difficulty of entry intended to inculcate humanity in all who enter, which has a similar effect with the “crawl-through” gate of *sukiya* teahouse (Figure 5.13).

stark concrete wall, and the worshiper is almost sidling through the acutely angular space in order to enter the chapel interior. By tenets of Western Modernism, this is a fatal absurdity and functional deficiency. Yet by Ando, such a move is both logical and essential. In fact, Ando conceived this space not so much as a functional shelter but as a sensitizing device to increase one's humanity when the self-consciousness of the being's body is evoked by the scale of space and intimate contact with material.<sup>65</sup> In this connection, this space also constitutes a “void pause” that bridges the worlds, the sacred and the profane. It

<sup>65</sup> Ando writes: “The world that appears to man's sense and the state of man's body becomes in this way interdependent. The world articulated by the body is a vivid, live-in space. The body articulates the world. At the same time, the body is articulated by world. When ‘I’ perceive the concrete to be something cold and hard, ‘I’ recognize the body as something warm and soft.” Tadao Ando, “*Shintai* and Space,” in *Architecture and Body* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988), unpaginated.



is a realm of purification where one detaches the mundane world, and anticipates the world of god and where simplest and most basic human activities such as entering, moving, and turning, assume a spiritual resonance. In this respect, his intent “*sentiment-fundamental space*” is fully affirmed.



Figure 5.12 The “crawl-through” gate of traditional *Sukiya*, Fushinan, Omote Senke, Kyoto. (Left) *Naka-kuguri*, literally “middle crawl-through gate”, actually fenceless fence with a gateless gate. (Right) The teahouse inside the garden, with its *nirji-guichi*, “the crawl-through entrance” of 60 by 60cm width with a wooden sliding door for guests to enter.

The physical nature and the underlying concept of the entry space has a rhetoric and spiritual parallel with the “crawl-through” gate of *sukiya* teahouse, which, since it is not a gate but a three-foot window, both invites and denies, separates and connects, and in so doing is intended to inculcate humanity in all who enter (Figure 5.12).<sup>66</sup> At the same time, Ando’s expression of the dual nature of existence and his imbuing the void with substantial meanings stems from a

<sup>66</sup>Traditional *sukiya* tea garden and teahouse is designed for training in Zen Buddhism. Everything in the garden is intended to introduce one’s action in such a way so as to increase one’s consciousness for the achievement of “enlightenment.” Gunter Nitschke writes the “crawl-through gate” at Fushinan Omote Senke: “True, (the “crawl-through gate”) visually separates the outer from the middle garden, and true, guests are greeted here for the first time by the host; but more than that, it constitutes a device to increase one’s consciousness of oneself. Crawling through this strange gate makes one more conscious of one’s own body, and in addition, it requires everyone to bow and be humbled, regardless of social status in the ordinary world.” Gunter Nitschke, *From Shinto to Ando: studies in architectural anthropology in Japan* (London: Academy Editions; Berlin: Ernst & Sohn; New York: Distributed to the trade in the United States of America by St. Martin’s Press, 1993), pp.75-76.



deep consciousness of *Ma*, which signifies an empty interval, charged with significance. Kisho Kurokawa alludes to this and writes: "(Traditional spatial layout) is designed not only to be functional, but also to accommodate aesthetic factors that cannot be explained in functional terms. This involves nonfunctional, "silent" spaces - spaces of withdrawal or detachment such as a corridor, a veranda, a *tokonoma* alcove, or a study (*shoin*). In Japan these *ma* are spaces of spiritual and philosophical significance that respond to the need for mental repose and detachment" (Kurokawa, 1988, p.56).

Complementing the second spatial layer, Ando arranged a third low L-shaped retaining wall to wrap the chapel on the northwestern side and separate it from the adjacent pastor's house (Figure 5.13). By now, the territory formation is put to an end. As Figure 5.5 shows, whereas a centripetal layout is discernable in the layered walls and spaces that apparently envelop one another from outside in, each layer is incomplete and indefinite, either dispersing into the vague surroundings or eventually debouching into another. The formation of this kind can hardly be understood in sense of "center-demarkation," but rather in sense of "*oku-wrap*." Since the territory for Ando is based not on an absolute center but on something indeterminate, it follows naturally that his territorial delineation is to envelop this basic something.<sup>67</sup> In addition, this spatial quality is also reflected in one's approach to the chapel, wherein one, instead of abruptly penetrating the boundary and encountering climax, moves along the peripheral space and

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<sup>67</sup> Maki writes on "*oku-envelopment*" in contrast to "center-delimitation": "Contrary to the act of delimitation, which is active, the enveloping process implies passivity and at the same time a flexibility that enables us to adopt and transform, freely, according to the form of whatever is to be enveloped (the indeterminate *oku*)." Serge Salat, *Fumihiko Maki: An Aesthetic of Fragmentation* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988), p.28.

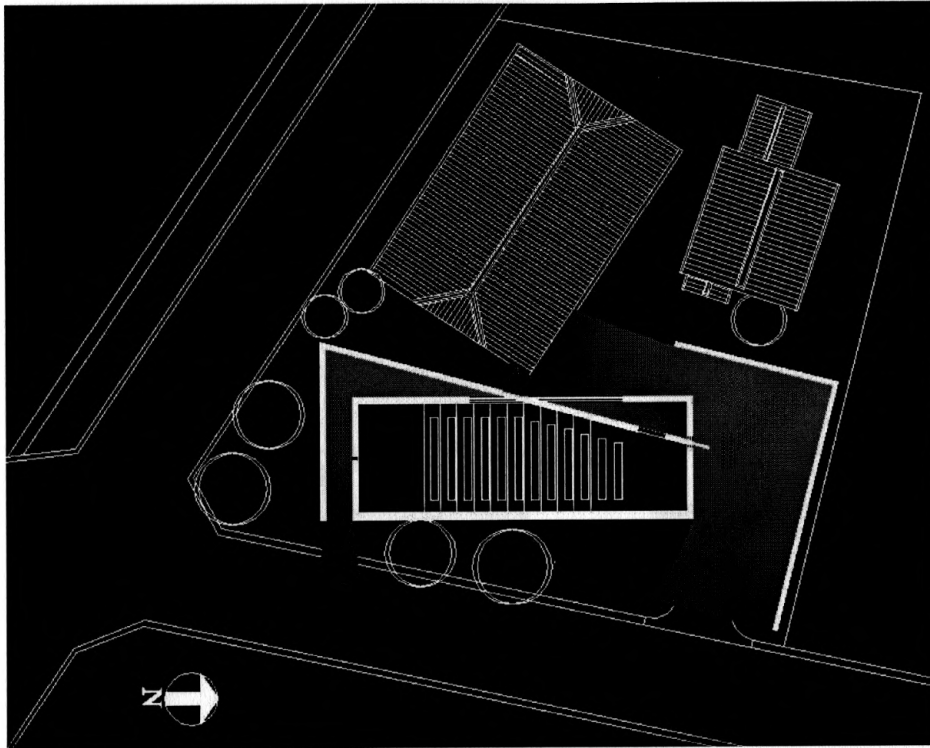


Figure 5.13 The third layer of wall/space of the centripetal spatial formation in the Church of the Light.

eventually merges into the inner space. The essential role of this third spatial layer is to organize the movement of this kind.

Upon entering the site, one is confronted with a corner of the austere concrete volume (Figure 5.14). There is neither spire nor entrance in sight. Enticing one forward is a long, horizontal entry wall. One approaches over an open court paved with bare concrete and glimpses a hazy vision of the inner court through thick tree branches. The spatial experience is that the destination seems deep inside. Near the end of the court, this wall changes its direction to the left and makes one turn 90 degrees around the concrete volume. Here, one suddenly faces a second but higher concrete wall that penetrates and disappears into the concrete volume. Signified by the glazed opening on the facade, the entrance becomes visible to the left (Figure 5.15). One takes a second left turn

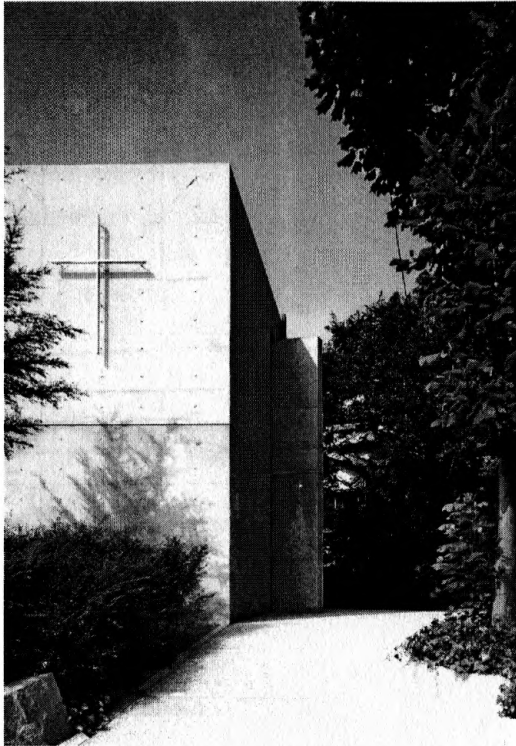


Figure 5.14 The forecourt of entry in the Church of the Light.



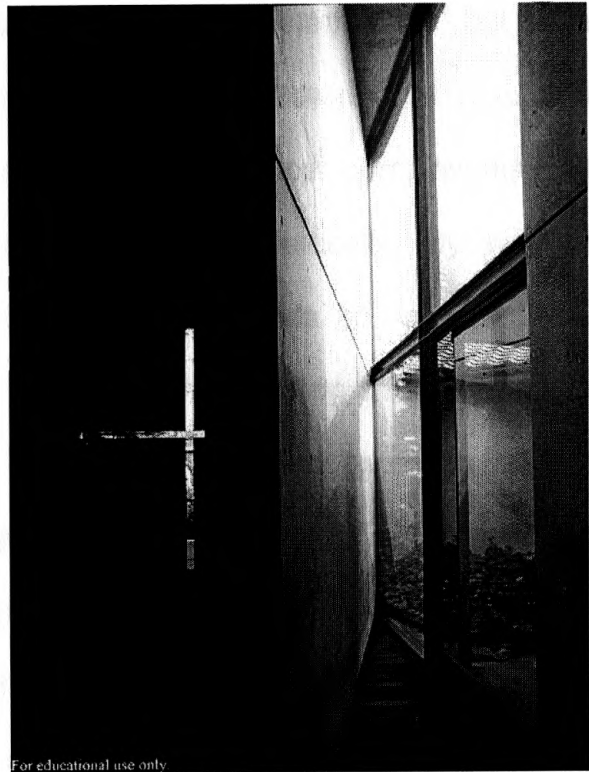
Figure 5.15 Entrance for the chapel in the Church of the Light.

and enters the Church. But where one is entering is not immediately disclosed, one is unexpectedly thrown into a cramped interstitial space (Figure 5.11). There is still no worship hall in sight. Almost hitting the blade concrete wall, one is forced to make a third 90 degree turn, and the reward is a fragmentary view of bushes in the forecourt through a vertical slit between the wall and the volume (Figure 5.16). When one is just brought inside, Ando deliberately directs one towards outside. What he did here is to reverse space and make space discontinuous, betraying common sense. The spatial result is a “void pause” stimulating one’s consciousness. Being turned back to where one came from implies the journey is near end. Here one makes a fourth turn of 180 degrees through a high doorway in the oblique wall. One is soon exposed to the wholly



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Figure 5.16 The vertical slit between the diagonal wall and main volume



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Figure 5.17 The second gate within the chapel interior

unlooked-for scene of cruciform light breaking the darkness at the deep end of chapel (Figure 5.17).

In the approach to chapel, one's route twists and skips forward and forms a convoluted 'S' movement that flows along the layered walls and spaces. It assumes a similar effect in the fragmentary space of traditional *sukiya* and stroll garden, on which Ando is unconsciously drawing.<sup>68</sup> By doing this, Ando has diverged from classical Christian space based on a longitudinal axis, with which one's movement and ritual process is aligned; his deep consciousness of traditional idea of *oku* and *ma* has given rise to a wholly other set of experiences. In the Church of the Light, one's approach here is above all supported, neither by

<sup>68</sup>Ando has applied a similar solution in designing the approach in Chapel on Mt. Rokko and wrote: "I may or may not have been influenced by the strolling garden style of traditional Japanese gardens when I designed the approach. Making several turns in approaching the building rather straight, one intensifies one's expectation gradually." Tadao Ando, "Chapel on Mt. Rokko 1986," *Space Design* (September, 1989), p.68.

an intelligible depth nor by a fixed center as in the western ones, but by a subjective, invisible depth created in the mind by *oku*. Following this, ritual and spirit are sought along the way that leads to the innermost core; events and activities take place in depth, horizontally and not vertically. By way of deliberately arranged layers and turnings, Ando intends to construct the fragmentary voids in a coherent whole, while temporally putting off the discovery of the indeterminate something. The organization of one's approach is thus spatialized as well as temporalized; space is never static but always manifested in time. This is the theory of *ma* that serves to structure the experience of space that implies the dimension of time and the process by which the *oku* unfolds itself in void, time, depth, and subjectivity. As a result, the true value of this work resides in the twofold existence of reality, center/periphery, fundamental/sentiment, void/substantial, wherein one amplifies its opposite counterpart, and yet both are recreated. And it is Ando's joint concern for *oku* and *ma* that underlies the centripetal spatial formation.



## Nature and Geometry

In Japan, the indivisibility of man and nature is at the root of its cultural tradition, to the extent that all forms of spiritual exercise take place in close proximity to nature. This sensibility has given birth to the concept of space *Ma* that, unlike the Western concept of space, is assimilated by the spiritual quality of nature and constitutes a non-existent or negated entity, becoming “emptiness.” In this respect, one can go as far as to define *ma* as the essence of emptiness generated by and perceived identically with natural phenomena or events. This elusive sense of *ma* permeates the idea of an indefinite architectural boundary made of the translucent and movable shoji panel that, by way of “framing” and “isolating,” refines raw natural elements in forms separated from the external world to determine motions of light-and-shadow and fragments of scene and recreates these independent worlds artificially in a tense composition in space. *Ma*, so conceived, “is the way to sense the moment of (natural) movement” (Isozaki, 1979, p.78). And the sense of *ma* assures us that nature, once abstracted into its essential and irreducible form, a form approaching emptiness, can exhibit her evocative and provocative power to an experiential space, far more than pure nature does. Ultimately, *ma* signifies the twofold expression of reality, the naturalized architecture and architecturalized nature, coexisting in the state of emptiness.

In Ando’s work, this dual awareness is predicated on the dialogue between nature and geometry. Yet above all, his ideology stems from a deep consciousness of *ma* insofar as he aims at spatiality (instead of physicality) of

natural forms that structure the phenomenological (as opposed to physical) order of his architectural spaces. Nature is thus not an addition or extension to his building, but a principal component of space.<sup>69</sup> Things like light-and-shadow are consciously manipulated to endow the "non-existent" space with a sense of profound substantiality similar to that evoked by *ma*, wherein the existential meaning of emptiness springs from the identification of form and non-form. In other words, Ando does not conceive space as an autonomous entity but instead explores its experiential and symbolic quality as meanings of the impalpable forms, involving the human participation. He writes: "The aim of my design is to impart rich meaning to spaces through natural elements and the many aspects of daily life. Such things as light and wind only have meaning when they are introduced inside a house in a form cut off from the outside world. The isolated fragment of light and air suggests the entire natural world" (Ando, 1982, p.9).

In this laconic passage, we also identify Ando's preoccupation with a paradoxical attitude on nature, whereby its tangibility is abstracted to retain its essentials; its totality is fragmented to imply its entirety. This "abstracted nature" derives from two sources: the first is his oppositional stance to consumerist reality;<sup>70</sup> the second lies on a deep level, as something consciously inherited from the traditional technique of "framing" and "isolating" in *Sukiya*, and the underlying concept of *ma*. His view is that contemporary man, devoured in the

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<sup>69</sup> Ando writes: "Light is a mediator between space and form. Light changes expressions with time. I believe that the architectural material do not end with wood or concrete that have tangible forms, but go beyond to include light and wind which appeal to our sense." Tadao Ando, "*Koshino Residence*," *Space Design* (June, 1981), p.15.

<sup>70</sup> As natural objects are challenged to their authenticity in the process of commercialization and modification, Ando generally excludes a superficial nature, in form of plants and vegetations soiled in architecture, an act which, as Frampton points out, "stems from a realization that planting is invariably employed today as a cheap ameliorative device; that is to say, as a sentiment aestheticization off an otherwise sterile, if not brutal condition." Kenneth Frampton, "The Work of Tadao Ando," in Yukio Futagawa, ed., *Tadao Ando* (Tokyo: A.D.A. EDIT, 1987), p.10.



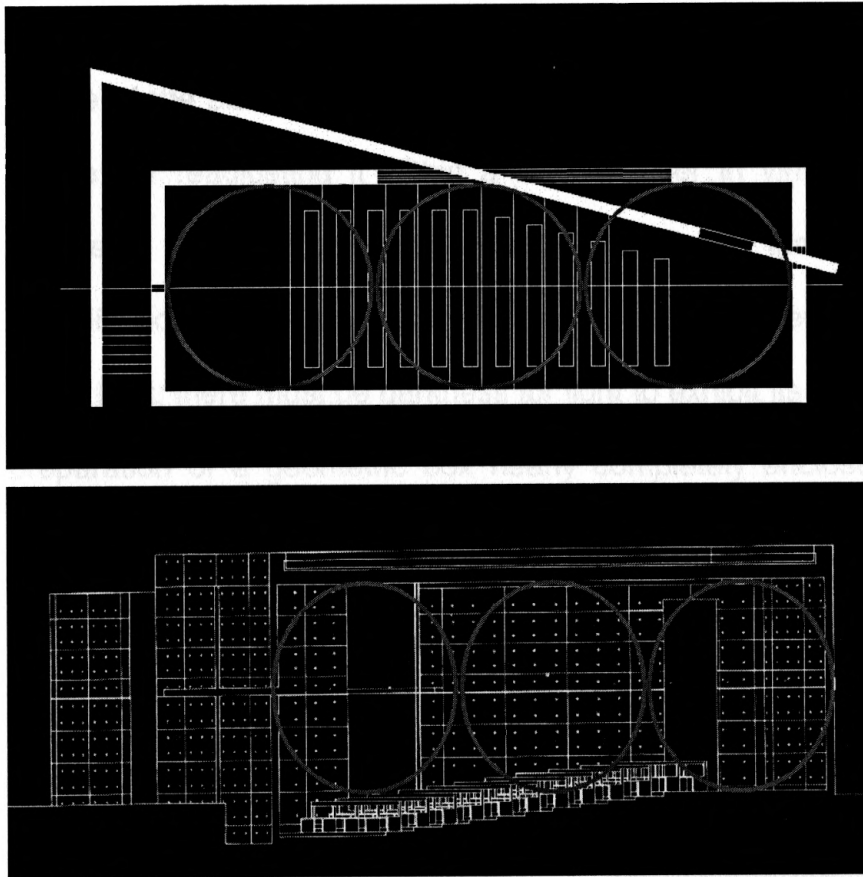


Figure 5.19 The geometrical order of the Church of the Light. (Above) Plan (Below) Section.

simple geometry is particularly at work, where the main chapel is a cuboid volume consisting of three 5.9m cubes (5.9m wide  $\times$  17.7m long  $\times$  5.9m high) (Figure 5.19). Its enclosing concrete walls form bare, smooth surfaces and glazed openings of full-size cut straight lines. Everything is on an inorganic plane ruled by geometrical order with integers determining the proportion of space. Yet far from being an autonomous object, this pristine geometrical form is a due expression of Ando's response to the individual spirit of the place. Located in a sunny region with many clear days, the Ibaraki area is featured by its distinctive strength of light, which Ando has appropriated as a symbol for both nature and

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transcend nature through reason." Tadao Ando, "In Dialogue with Geometry: The Creation of 'Landscape'," in *GA Architect: Tadao Ando* (Tokyo: A.D.A. Edita, 1993), p.24.

deity. Despite the poverty of local landscape, Ando has grasped the essential nature of the place, and transforms it into the unique fertility of his architectural theme, by readjusting it within a deeper layer in virtue of the abstraction of geometry. Towards this end, Ando lines up the three cubes in depth and established a longitudinal axis towards the sun. However, light alone does not make light; there must be darkness for light to exhibit its brilliance and vitality. His preparation of a geometric box nearly completely enclosed by thick concrete walls is thus an effort of constructing the darkness.

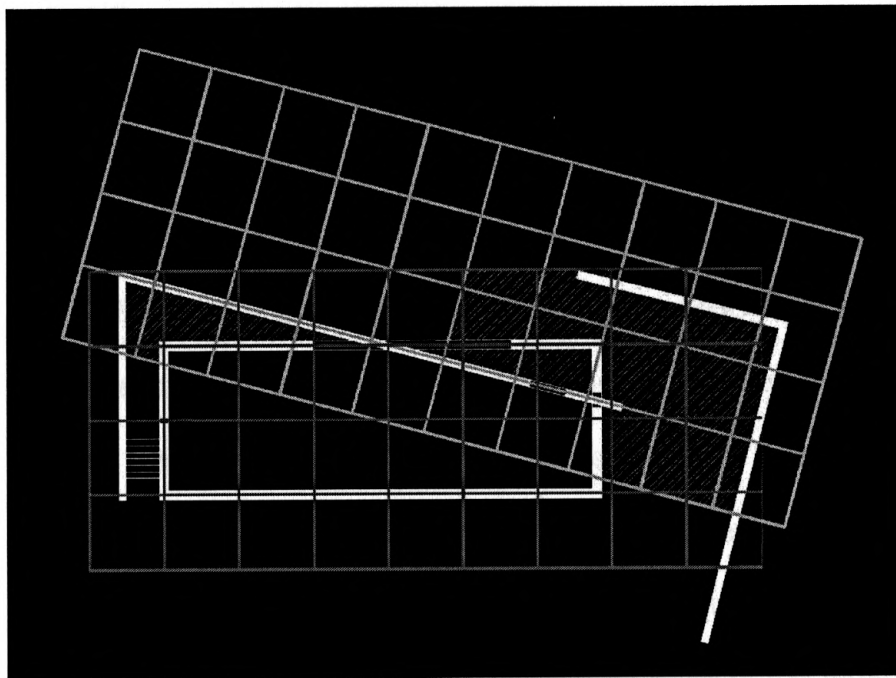


Figure 5.20 The collision between deviation and system in the geometry of the Church of the Light. Essential to the geometric composition, there is this kind of intervention shifted out of the uniform orthogonal order so as to temp the rigidity of geometry and introduce nature.

Upon this orthogonal system, Ando then superimposes a diagonal one, and purposely deviates from the uniform order so that both deviation and system mutual define each other through opposition (Figure 5.20). Essential to this collision is the generation of “gap” and “void,” Ando’s most singular design interventions, that he deliberately opens between the two systems by way of



layered walls and their interstices, partial enclosures and carefully placed openings. These gaps and voids reflect Ando's dichotomous perception of modern reality – that is, they are installed with the dual purpose of excluding the formless urban sprawl on one hand, and afterward, including, architecturalizing, and rendering abstract the natural element (of light) as it sneaking inside the other. Botond Bogнар alludes to this effort and writes: "The rediscovery and reinterpretation of nature's intimate relationship to architecture is one such gap through which architectures are escaping the urban and cultural predicament of today"(Bognar, 1990, p.22). Yet while wedged in a contemporary circumstance, this idea of "gap" and "void" for Ando, be it physical or metaphysical, has a deeper, spiritual parallel with the traditional belief that man forms a more intimate relationship with nature when it is seen framed rather than by exposure to nature in its infinitely broad expanse. In this respect, Ando's geometry, far from being a separate spatial entity as in western cases, acts as an instrument to abstract nature and prepare it for the generating of space, as his ingenious reinterpretation of the traditional technique of "framing" and "isolating" in refining the raw nature.<sup>72</sup> It is precisely here that one can go as far as to claim that for Ando, geometry is seen as the essential attribute of the elusive concept *Ma* that as aforementioned, not only signifies space, but also signifies the way to sense the movement of nature. Fumihiko Maki directly points to this and remarks, "His (Ando's) skillful handling of the traditional Japanese concept of *ma* within the

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<sup>72</sup> This point is clearly formulated by Ando: "Geometry produces the overall framework, as well as each aspect of the landscape produced by its parts. At the same time, geometry isolated the surrounding landscape, frame-like, drawing it into prominence...In the process of its application, geometry lays bare the individual spirit of the site, subjecting it to harsh dialogue, and delivering it, through refinement, to a new existence." Tadao Ando, "In Dialogue with Geometry: The Creation of 'Landscape'," in *GA Architect: Tadao Ando* (Tokyo: A.D.A. Edita, 1993), p.24.

porous matrix which his framework creates is particularly noteworthy”(Nishizawa, 1981, p.3). This “porous matrix,” or what I phrase as “gap” and “void,” are evidently in the ubiquitous slots of light and the court of light, the two major sources of nature within this building.

Upon entering the chapel, worshipers are immediately directed by the tall narrow space as it descends down stepwise to the altar at the south end. Here, the entire height and width of the concrete wall is carved out by horizontal and vertical glazed slits, which in any case are only 20cm wide, and the sunlight streaming through shapes a cross of light. For this crucifix, the 16mm float glass is embedded directly into bare concrete without intermediate frame so as to highlight further the dramatic scene of the light penetrating through it. Complementing this, a second full-height glazed slot is provided where the angled blade of concrete cut through the rear end of the building. Ando does the same intervention with the roof slab, where a third 18cm high gap is inserted between the ceiling and the top of the angled wall. While the cross opening in the front wall serves the principal illuminating source, slots on minor side admit diffusive light and help to mediate the contrast between the brilliant light and the darkened interior (Figure 5.21). Yet even here, Ando’s repeated use of gaps is not only for the architectural purpose of identifying the autonomy of the distinctive planes and geometric systems. Their essential role is to act as the way to sense the movement of nature, and in so doing, transform the geometric volume into a

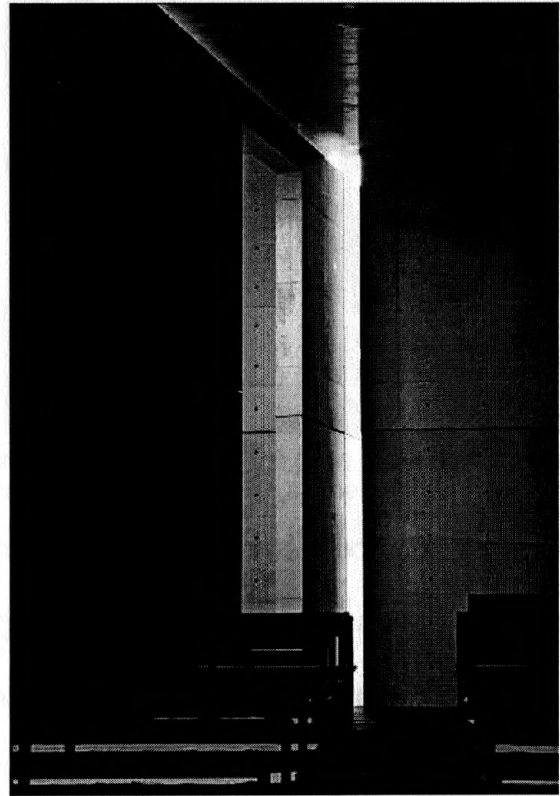
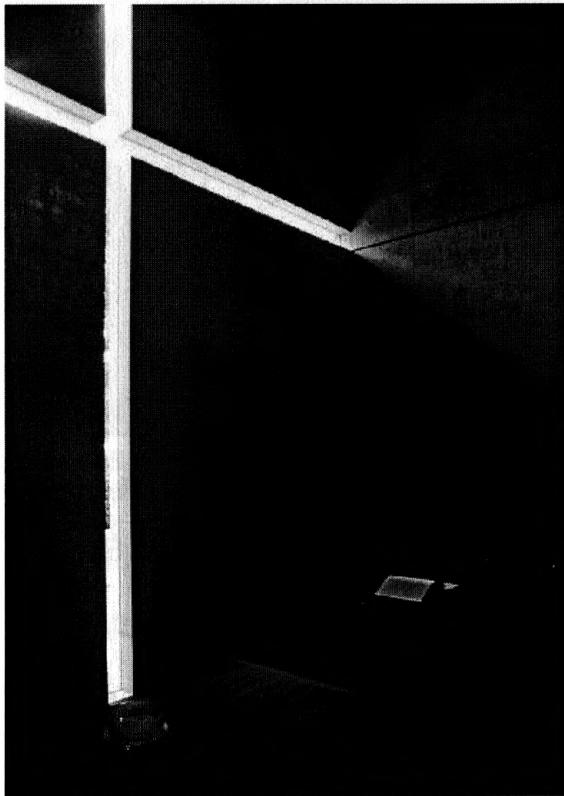


Figure 5.21 The ubiquitous “gaps” installed within the chapel. These gaps created between planes of colliding systems intervene geometric rigidity, while abstract natural elements (of light), and endues them with architectural reality.

“porous matrix” of indefinite space, in Maki ‘s phrase (Figure 5.22). By measuring time and nature through the movement of light-and-shadow or the sound of rain above the roof, these gaps evoke the real existence of space, the substantial, all-embracing emptiness wherein these natural events take place. This is informed in the sense of *ma* as a capacity for phenomenally evaluating the “nonexistent.”

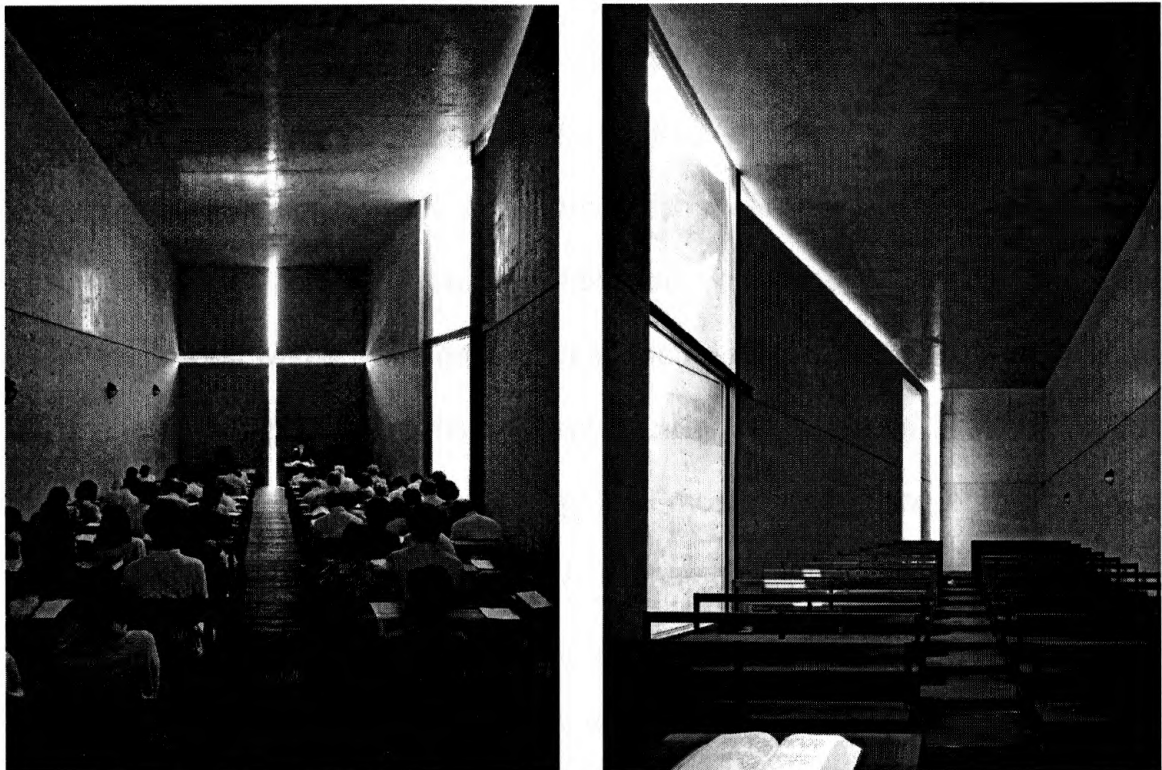


Figure 5. 22 The Interior space of the Church of the Light. By virtue of the gaps, the geometric space is naturalized, and transformed in to a “porous matrix” of indefinite space.

By virtue of the geometric framework, these gaps recreate natural elements within the context of space and give actuality to these elements that are only diluted in the expanse of the external world. Meanwhile, natural elements fluctuate against and animate the geometric planes, endowing them with an organic presence. As a result of the reciprocal dialogue and mutual transformation of this kind, nature is architecturalized and geometry is naturalized,

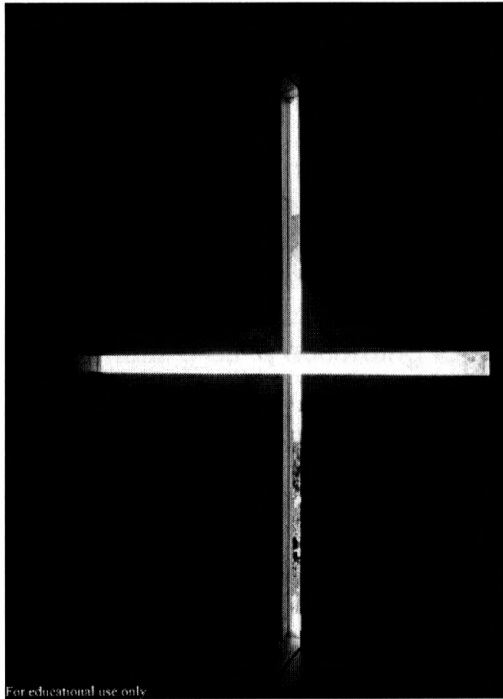
at the same time the architecture is turned into a space of dynamic variance, pulsating in the “gap” between the two. In other words, Ando believes that meanings are generated, not from the stable opposition of the contradictory elements, but rather from the irrational, non-dichotomous “gap” in between, wherein the opposites are subjected to a harsh collision to the extent that their boundary is dismantled and both are regenerated to produce a new entity of meanings. This strong awareness of the dual nature of existence recalls the “logic of identity and non-identity” of Buddhist philosophy and hinges more directly upon the traditional ideogram *ma*, which means an empty interval in both space and time, implicitly referring to the “gap,” or “discontinuous continuity” of this kind.<sup>73</sup> Ando writes: “The gap between elements colliding in opposition must be opened. This gap – the *ma* concept peculiar to Japanese aesthetic is just such a place. *Ma* is never a peaceful golden mean, but a place of the harshest conflict. And it is with *ma* thus informed with harshness that I want to continue to try and provoke the human spirit” (Ando, 2000, p.9).

In the Church of the Light, this notion of “gap – *ma*” is further presented in the confrontation between occidental and oriental forms and values. Of the ubiquitous slots within the chapel, the cruciform void, which simultaneously signifies nature and divine spirit, constitutes an occidental/oriental dyad. Regardless of its cruciform shape, this opening frames and isolates inside a

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<sup>73</sup> Ando’s ideology, as described in the above sense, has an underlying philosophical root in “the logic of identity and non-identity,” phrased by Zen philosopher Daisetz Suzuki, which is summed up by the Buddhist statement of “A is non-A; therefore it is called A.” And it is fair to claim that this concept has much to do in the shaping of the traditional sense of *ma* in Japanese culture generally, and in architecture particularly. Kisho Kurokawa discusses about the “logic of identity and non-identity” (and further links this to Japanese spatial concept): “(A and non-A) are actually the same, since they are dynamically interrelated and in fact each is the sine qua non, and in a soteriological sense, the cause of the other. In other words, what seem to be contradictions turn out in the end to be identities, which is why Suzuki calls the mutually inclusive relation of part and whole a logic of identity and nonidentity.” Kurokawa, Kisho. *Rediscovering Japanese Space* (New York: Weatherhill, 1988), p.43.





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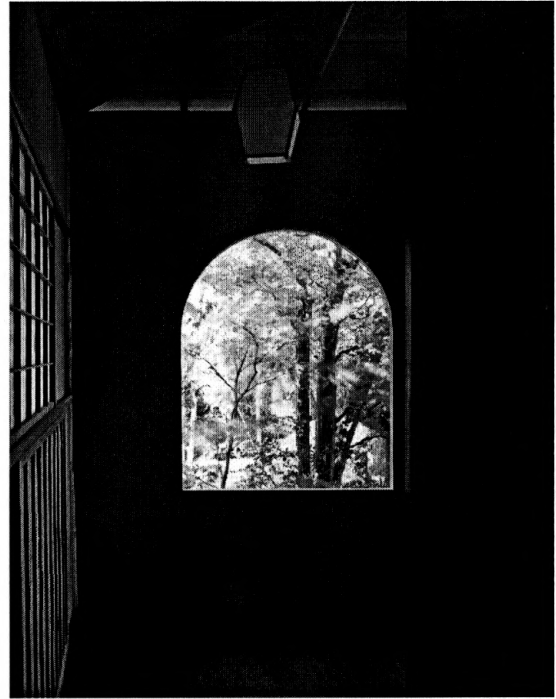


Figure 5.23 The technique of “framing” and “isolating” nature. (Left) The cruciform gap in the Church of the Light serves dual purposes, simultaneous abstracting nature and symbolizing divine spirit. (Right) The traditional picture-frame window of sukiya house, at Kitamura, Kyoto.

fraction of nature that coincides more with human dimension, reminiscent of the traditional technique in *Sukiya* (Figure 5.23). And it is exactly this association that enables Ando to further free and expand the traditional meaning of the chief Christian symbol, the crucifix. Considered as a sacred object in space, the crucifix usually appears in substantial forms as a complex iconography signifying sacrifice, atonement, salvation, and resurrection. While the impact of the cross is even more prominent in the Church of the Light, its traditional significance is weakened. Engraved negatively upon the wall and traced by light, the crucifix becomes a void and exhibits an immaterial and elusive quality. By this, Ando intends to represent the silent “non-sign” of Japanese natural philosophy that is

to spark the absolute and formless void at the heart of all beings, the godhead.

Ando claims (1989a, p.17):

In the West, a sacred space is transcendental. However, I believe that a sacred space must be related in some way to nature, which has nothing to do with animism or pantheism. For me, the nature that a sacred space must relate to is a man-made nature, or rather an architecturalized nature. I believe that when greenery, water, light or wind is abstracted from nature-as-is according to man's will, it approaches the sacred.

By virtue of this empty sign, Ando has also denied the traditional orientation of the Christian Church, and instead initiated a totally distinct idea of the holy. In traditional Christian spaces, the crucifix marks the destination of ritual approach and signifies a point from which the vertical axis of celestial dimension begins. While the cruciform void in the Church of the Light refines nature inside, it simultaneously extends one's vision horizontally, beyond the altar, towards the outside, and a larger, invisible nature outside is thus created in one's imagination. And because the chapel space is so enclosed and contained, it is as if the pressure inside tends to swirl out through the open cross and explode outside. In all these connections, the spatial result gives rise to the existence and the significance of an indefinite, unattainable depth and an overall unseen, remote place where divine spirit may reside, and thus evokes the sense of *oku*. The cross is characterized, not by confirming the presence of god, but by signifying the absence of god; and in fact, it bridges the *ma* between the worlds, the world of gods and the world of human, and becomes the doorway to the spirituality.<sup>74</sup> The ultimate spatial experience is the rejection of the notion of an absolute center.

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<sup>74</sup> Isozaki writes: "*Ma* divides the world...Anything that crossed, filled, connected or projected into the interim *ma* between two edges was called a *hashi*. The two worlds could be this side and that side, the secular world and the heavenly world..."Isozaki, Arata. "Ma: Japanese Time Space" *The Japan Architect* (February 1979): p.77.

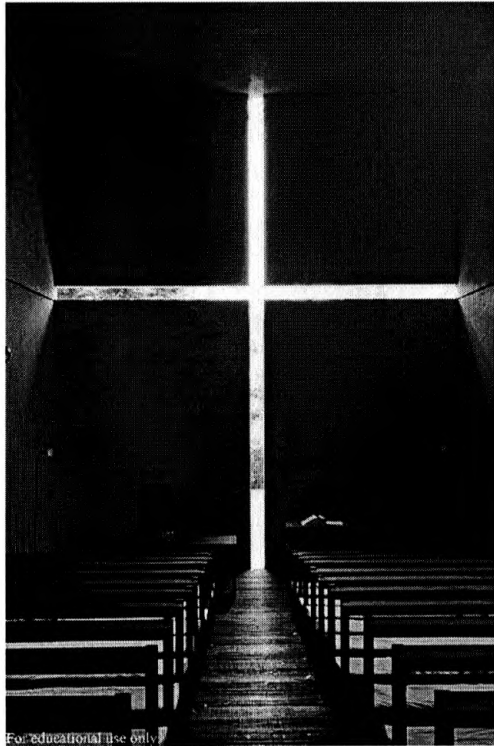


Figure 5.24 The existence of *oku* evoked in an indefinite, unattainable depth. (Left) In its void, the crucifix leads one forward into a subjective depth, horizontally and not vertically. (Right) The *torii* gate implies the *oku* in a remote place of mountain, Shikano-umi shrine, Shikanoshima-mura.

In these connections, Ando's cruciform void alludes to the traditional *torii* at Shinto shrine, the "gateway" for the gods. Usually standing on the mountain pass, the *torii* simultaneously frames a fragment of remote scene and implies the existence *oku* recessed deeper in the mountain (Figure 5.24).

In addition to this cruciform slot in the chapel, the other equal powerful representation of Ando's abstracted nature and geometry is signified by the void in the form of the exterior court of the light. In order to reassert nature as the ultimate fountain of spirituality, Ando separates the focus of the chapel between the cross of light at the end of the altar and the tranquility of a walled court attached to the lateral side of the chapel. By doing this, Ando de-emphasizes the

self-domination of the longitudinal axis in traditional Christian church and instead juxtaposes side by side with it another notion of space – that is, the oneness of

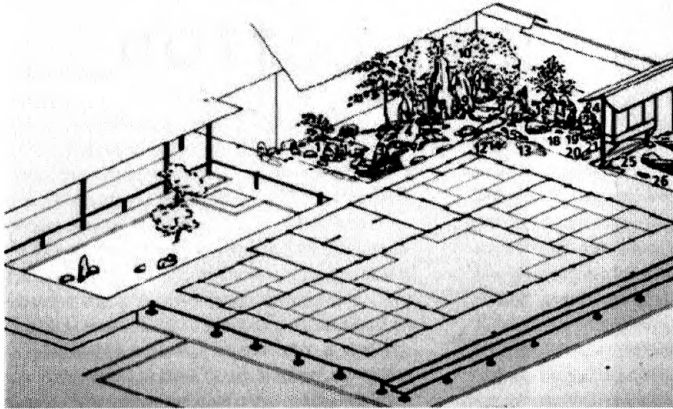
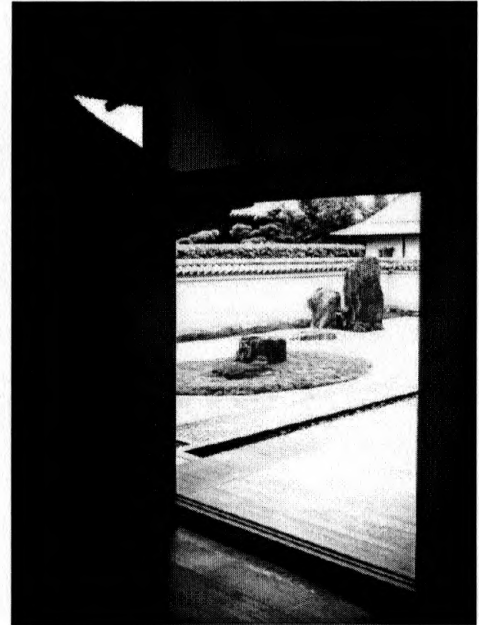


Figure 5.25 The temple - garden scheme in traditional Japanese Zen sect. The figure shows the structure at Daisen'in, Daitokuji (1513). In this format, the rectangular plan of building is usually flanked by a dry landscape garden on its longitudinal side.



building and garden in traditional Japanese territory layout, as something informed by the idea of *ma* denoting the identification of architectural space and natural phenomena. While the chapel space is clearly basilica in origin, except that it is truncated at the altar end, the empty courtyard and its position alongside the chapel body alludes to the traditional Zen temple – garden (of dry landscape) scheme (Figure 5.25). Once again, the notion of *ma* is characterized by this confrontation of occidental/oriental origins, as Frampton remarks:

(T)wo countervailing notions of the spiritual are juxtaposed side by side, so as to effect an abrupt contrast between the significance of the crucifix and the empty silence of the void; to oppose, that is, the sign of the West with the non-sign of the East”(1991, p.14-15).<sup>75</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Frampton also writes: “For Ando this discontinuous-continuity is seen as an essential attribute of the elusive concept *Ma*...Discontinuous-continuity may be said to characterize the confrontation between occidental and oriental values that permeates Ando’s architecture at every conceivable level.” Kenneth Frampton, *Tadao Ando/ Kenneth Frampton* (New York: Museum of Modern Art; Distributed by H.N. Abrams, c1991), p.14-15.

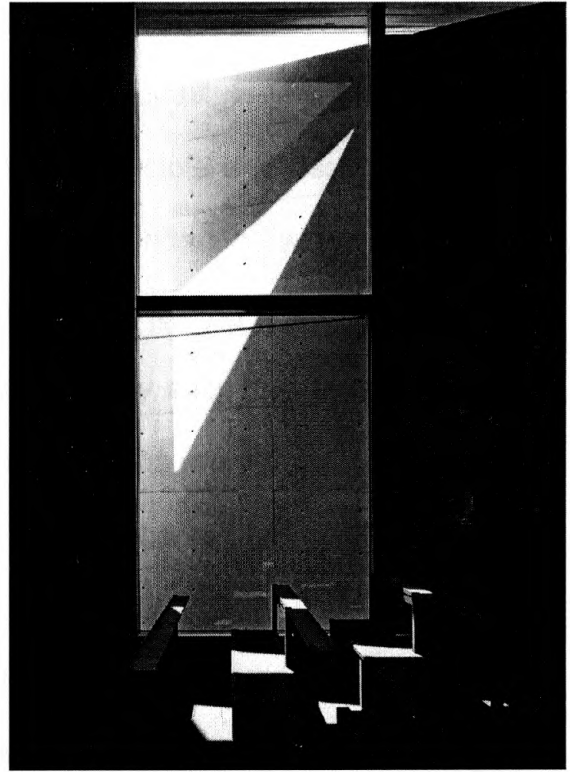


Figure 5.26 The court of light in the Church of the Light. (Left) exterior view of the court, (Right) View from the chapel interior towards the court. The physical nature and the experience of light, spatial layout recalls with the traditional temple-garden formation. And this empty court constitutes Ando's paradigm of "substantial void."

Ando, however, makes no stylistic reference but a tonal one to the traditional Japanese garden, and reinterprets it in the void wherein the theme of the encounter of geometry with nature is pursued. Unlike those within the chapel, the geometric walls here act as a three-dimensional frame to enclose an interstitial void that Ando purposely opens between the two colliding formal system to interject into the rigidity of geometry the atypical events of nature. Paved with white stones and enclosed by bare concrete walls, this empty court is seen as the provider of a calm, character-forming realm wherein the void is rendered perceivable by light, wind, rain, and the framed sky: the abstract, irreducible natural elements (Figure 5.26). This is close to the idea of *ma*, wherein the ineffable presence of the "non-existent" is sensed through the



elusive events and phenomena of nature. This is at a phenomenological and experiential level. Symbolically, this empty space constitutes for Ando an icon of “substantial void,” whereby the abstract, yet irreducible and essential nature in the above sense gives rise to a microcosmic domain, which enables the individual to escape the urban morass and regain a feeling of tranquility, which is as critical of contemporary material life as poetically evocative to the substantial meanings of our existence. In other words, meanings are generated in the “gap” between void and substance, in the same spirit of *ma* as the “meaningful void” (I will have more to say on this later).

In conclusion, Ando’s skillful handling of the traditional sense of *ma* in relation to nature-geometry may be considered on two levels: In the first place, the idea of space signified by *ma* is readily appreciated in his quasi-phenomenological rendering of empty space by way of his “abstracted nature,” either in the interior chapel space or the exterior courtyard space. In the second, Ando’s reinterpretation of *ma* as a “way to sense the movement of nature” is predicated in his manipulation of geometry, by way of the (physical) gaps and voids installed within the overall framework with the purpose of architecturalizing nature. In this connection, geometry appears for Ando as an ambiguous indication: Ando values the “absolute” of geometrical space in giving order to the formless natural or urban environment, while also recognizing its capability to be inflected with regard to the individual spirit of place and to be transformed into a place of sense under the impact of nature. In other words, the gap between nature and geometry is mediated in the sense of *ma*. From this mutual

transformation of nature/geometry, Ando has sublimated the notion of “gap” to a metaphysical level and in so doing, has grasped the attribute of *ma* that signifies the twofold articulation of reality. Wedged in the notion of “gap-*ma*,” Ando has rendered this work as a subtle interface wherein all the others follow: abstraction/representation, void/substantial, Occidental/Oriental. Taking these opposites beyond their stable confrontation to where a sustained tension emerges between the two in their dynamic collision and mutual transformation, Ando generates the artistic character of his work on the paradox of this kind. As Tom Heneghar remarks: “It is through the transfiguration of these antagonistic opposites – this dialogue of extremes – that Ando generates the lyricism, the originality and the meaning of his architecture” (Ando, 1996, p.19).

## Materiality and Immateriality

In the first chapter, the Japanese concept of *ma* is discussed in relation to material forms, and their traditional architecture, *sukiya* for instance, features a unique delicacy obtained in the vertical and horizontal lines of wood structure and the assiduous handling of fragile substance, like paper, natural wood, and earth.<sup>76</sup> This has given birth to an indefinite architectural form that determines a permeation of light-and shadows in such a way as to reflect and mingle with the perpetual transformation and changes of the (natural) world. Within this, the underlying concept of *ma* conveys a dual awareness of materiality and immateriality, wherein there is an attempt to treat material not as substance, but as ephemeral, insubstantial “events” and impart a sense to impermanence of fixed forms. This is formulated, perhaps more comprehensively than elsewhere, by Arata Isozaki when he describes *ma* in term of the Japanese aesthetic concept *sabi* and claims: “*Ma* is a sign of the ephemeral”(1979, p79).<sup>77</sup> To understand this, we are bound to recognize a certain underlying Buddhist philosophy that has made an indispensable contribution to the shaping of Japanese culture.

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<sup>76</sup> See “Form and Non-Form, Materiality and Immateriality,” in *Ma – Space, Emptiness*, the first chapter of this work.

<sup>77</sup> Arata Isozaki also writes: “The look of age that things acquire with the passing of time, the charm of desolation are part of the celebrated Japanese spirit of *sabi*, which is indication of the ultimate destruction of the ultimate destruction of all thing, the transience of everything. Visible objects gradually fade into shadows of themselves. The living human being becomes a dead corpse and then a fleshless skeleton. The awareness of the impermanence of things giver rise to the Japanese eschatology according to which one must be resigned to live from moment to moment with no hope of salvation from ineluctable catastrophe.” Kurokawa writes on traditional Japanese aesthetic: “In earliest times, beauty, therefore meaning, was found in concrete things, *mono*, which were visible to the eye...By the medieval period, this basic aesthetic attitude was supplemented with an emphasis on spiritual qualities that could not be detected with the eye, and this sentiment, sensitivity to things (*mono no aware*), became the central aesthetic concept. Slowly, however, as the medieval age gave away to early modern times, things began to fade from aesthetic consciousness until sensitivity alone remained. The major aesthetic concepts ...wabi and *sabi* (two words that defy brief translation) that developed thereafter attempt to express a condition, atmosphere, or spiritual quality rather than a material or concrete quality.” Kisho Kurokawa, *Rediscovering Japanese Space* (New York: Weatherhill, 1988), p.60.

The Buddhist concept of “impermanence” and “transience” teaches that all forms of the phenomenal world are in a process of perpetual creation, destruction, and regeneration, transforming into one another endlessly.<sup>78</sup> Man must be aware of how ephemeral is all existence. Within this context, man’s apprehension of things is tightly tethered to the passage of time, that is, to understand “objects” not as “things” but as “events” or “phenomena,” which ultimately denies the existence of material substance. And from this comes the idea that rather than subjugate nature or attach fixed forms, to exist within the phenomenal world and to transform with it is the starting point in attaining the ultimate reality of the world. In architecture thereby, as Ando writes: “According to traditional Japanese interpretation, architecture is always one with nature and attempts to isolate and fix in a point of time nature as it exists in its organic metamorphoses. It is an architecture reduced to the extremes of simplicity, and an aesthetic so devoid of actuality that it approached theories of *mu*, or nothingness”(Ando, 1982, p.11).<sup>79</sup> In the same spirit of the above sense, *Ma*, used as a constituent of space, is the creating or remolding of material forms in such a way as to awaken the experience of *sabi*, the transient, ephemeral phenomenon, which is the essential reality at the heart of all things. And this is the theme that Ando explores in the Church of the Light by way of the dematerialization of concrete with light.

The principal (palpable) material in the Church of the Light is concrete, or rather, concrete walls. Within this, glass and wood are used in secondary ways.

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<sup>78</sup>The central aim of Buddhist philosophy is to experience all particular forms in the world as manifestations of one ultimate reality - the absolute Emptiness, or *Sūyatā*. For more information on the following discussion, also see “Time Influenced by Buddhism,” in *Ma - Time, Interval, Flux*, the third chapter of this work.

<sup>79</sup>It should be noted here that the term *Mu* and *Ku*, Nothingness and Emptiness are in most case interchangeable. In Buddhist philosophy, all of them denote the ultimate reality of the universe, the absolute Emptiness.

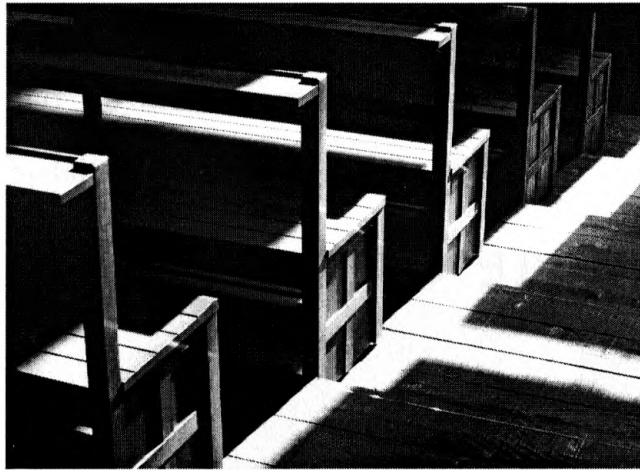
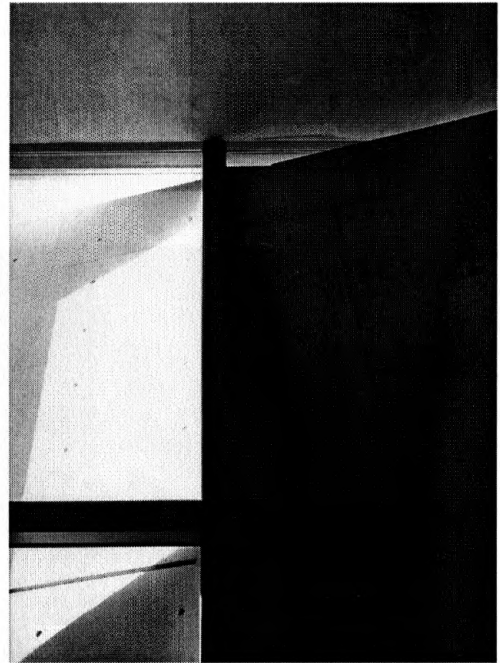


Figure 5.27 Material conditions in the Church of the Light. The three materials used in the building are concrete, wood, and glass.



The first is used for slot-like openings that build cautious transitions between inside and outside, and the latter for built-in seats and floor (Figure 5.27). The space of this building is nearly completely enclosed by concrete planes, and its material conditions thus entirely deviate from the delicacy and lightness of traditional *Sukiya*. Yet it is exactly here that Ando explores the possibilities afforded by reinforced concrete with regard to the creation of “material phenomena,” which enable one to perceive the hidden connection between Ando’s concrete and the paper screen of *Sukiya*. To create in the most substantial material the illusion of events is contrary to common sense. To have a material of ethereality by which one would expect solidity and rigidity is to reverse one’s experience and make its materiality discontinuous. Yet this discontinuous continuity is seen for Ando as an inherent attribute of *ma*, and this gap between materiality and immateriality, existence and non-existence, reality and fiction is what he seeks not to avoid but explore in the Church of the Light.



To fulfill this, however, requires that necessary pre-conditions are established, and we must inevitably examine Ando's assiduous handling of the intrinsic materiality of concrete.



Figure 5.28 Traditional *sabi* sensibility embodied in the aesthetic appreciation of materiality. (Left) The court of light in the Church of the Light, (Right) The dry landscape garden at Ryōanji Temple, Kyoto. In both case, man-made materials are assimilated by the texture of nature, indicating the passage of time and the ultimate destruction of things.

The walls in the Church of the Light are made of on-site poured concrete, and the main reinforced concrete shell of the chapel is 380mm (15in) thick. Ando presents to the street side undecorated, exposed concrete facades, allowing their austere countenance to look distinctive in the ubiquitous sprawl of residential architecture. Partly because of budget problems, the exterior surfaces of the church are not so smoothly finished as in his other buildings but bear the traces of successive pours and the patching of imperfections. Ando makes no attempt to conceal them. Instead, these flaws and defects allow the concrete surface to trace the passing of time in the guise of the flecks produced by rain,

wind and sun, which are incorporated as part of the materiality itself. Ando relishes them as serendipitous texture as well as the quality of the material created under the unpredictable impact of nature. These walls thus acquire an effect of patina, just as in traditional gardens, the antiquity and beauty of the wall is sensed through the dust and moss accumulated on the surface with temporal flow (Figure 5.28). A sense of *sabi* is thus awakened when the beauty of imperfection is combined by primitive antique. It is evident that his reinforced concrete, which he considers an antithesis to that of Le Corbusier, is not primarily the product of technological, economic, or even functional considerations, but rather an organic, ephemeral phenomenon adrift in time that reveals the sign of life. With regard to this, Ando remarks (1983, p.203):

I want to give concrete, not coarseness associated with the material in Le Corbusier's works, but a more refined expression. That is something that came from my own sensibility, and thought such a refinement may be disappearing today, it survives in the Japanese attitude towards life, a fact corroborated by the distinctively Japanese aesthetic.

While equally bare concrete surfaces are exposed inside the chapel, considerable care is taken to see that they are as perfect as technique allows. In the tradition of *Sukiya*, Ando attempts to explore its expressive potential to the utmost level so as to uncover the intrinsic attribute of reinforced concrete and endow it with an essential, indisputable character in both the density of the mass and precision of the surface.<sup>80</sup> As the result of an exquisite craft, the materiality of Ando's concrete is to be understood as much by the body as by the eye. It is as one sidles through the narrow entrance hall of the church and contacts its

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<sup>80</sup> For the "formula" for Ando's concrete making process, see Catherine Slessor, "Tadao Ando – the Realm of *Wabi*," in *Concrete Regionalism / Catherine Slessor* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000), p.51.

surface with one's corporeal body that the intensity and density of the concrete is fully registered. Upon entering the chapel, one's eye takes time to adjust to the luminosity. Lacquered with a latex protective coating, the interior concrete walls result in a luminous sheen on the surface. Openings are placed at both ends and one longitudinal side of the chapel, so that natural light is invited inside, reflected

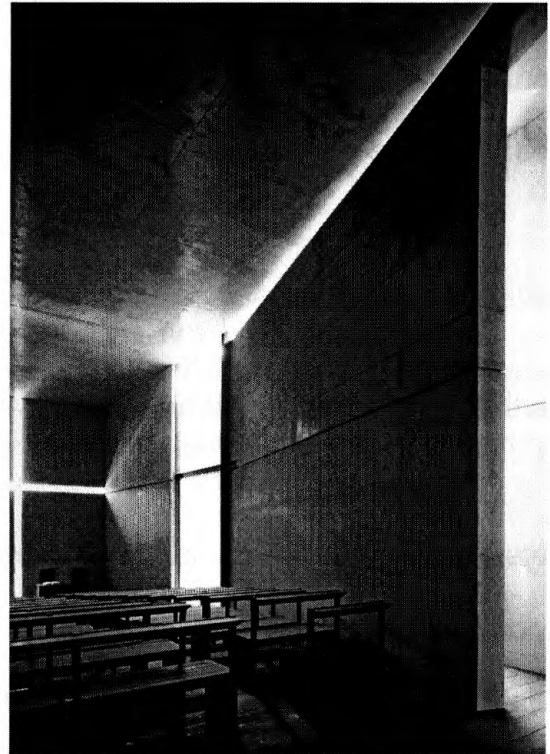
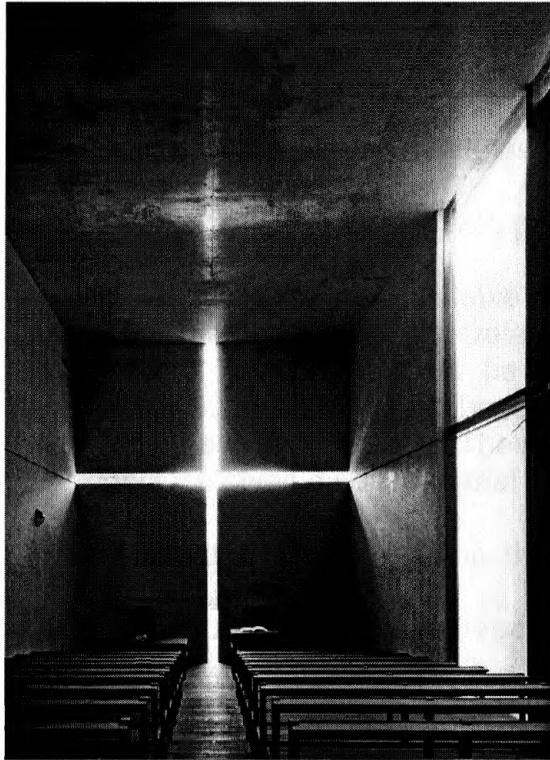


Figure 5.29 The dematerialization of concrete under the impact of natural light. The concrete substance is distorted, assimilated by light, and transformed into a phenomenon, assuming an elusive, transient nature of existence.

off the ceiling and walls by the glass-like concrete, which helps to distribute the light more evenly. When animated by light, the concrete embodies its sublime potential of materiality to be dematerialized by nature, in the way that light transforms its intensity into delicacy, heaviness into lightness, and ponderous mass into scintillating sheet. With all energy floating on the surface, the concrete loses its solidity or weight, but instead gives an impression of translucency and

ethereality as if it were a light material comparable to the traditional shoji screen. Yet this is not meant as tableaux. With each deviation in the movement of light's penetration, the concrete surface is constantly regenerated and transformed into sequential images of light-and-shadow, each of which attempts to capture the elusive, transient nature of existence. Ultimately, the concrete is dematerialized to lose its substance, assimilated by light, and transformed into a phenomenon, resounding with the rhythmic change of the natural event (Figure 5.29). And the phenomenon of this kind constitutes the substantial content of the space. Ando describes his creative intent (1982, p.12):

Concrete is the most suitable material for realizing spaces created by rays of sunlight. But the concrete I employ does not have plastic rigidity or weight. Instead, it must be homogeneous and light and must create surface...(so that) Walls become abstract, are negated, and approach the ultimate limit of space. Their actuality is lost, and only the space they enclose gives a sense of real existing.

Within the chapel, one is thus made aware of emptiness, a concrete enclave without extraneous features, making the cycle of day and rendered only by the manifestation of light. The space is thus reduced to bare essentials of pure concrete, light, and geometry, an entity of "zero degree" to which all meanings converge (Figure 5.30). As a result, the space reveals the kind of meaning Ando evokes is intended to focus our experience, by expurgating anything frivolous, on what he sees as the most real, that is, the ultimate emptiness at the heart of space as well as all beings.<sup>81</sup> In other words, Ando identifies an illogical "gap" between "zero degree" (void) and "complex degree" (substantial meaning). This

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<sup>81</sup> Ando alludes to this and writes: "But my selection of unfinished concrete as the material for floors, walls, and ceiling was based, not on budget, but on desire to produce spatial purity. In other words, all of the enclosing surfaces of the spaces-aside from the openings-are of one material because I wanted to find out what would happen when spatial



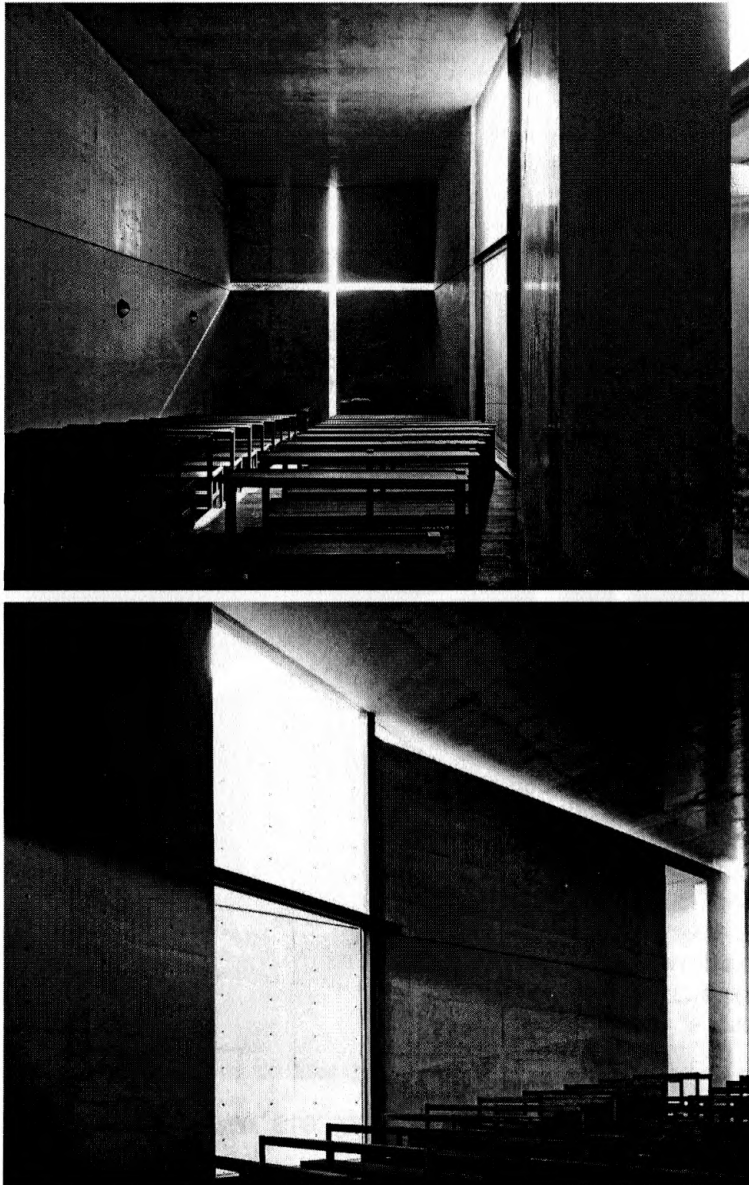


Figure 5.30 The concrete enclave of emptiness. As the result of Ando's skillful manipulation of pure, abstract concrete, light and geometry, space is reduced to bare essentials, and converges to "zero degree".

awareness brings Ando not only intimate with the Buddhist equation "zero equals infinity, form equals non-form, and vice-verse"; but also with the concept of *ma* referring to the "gap" of this kind.<sup>82</sup>

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meanings was pursued to the point beyond which no further questioning would be possible." Tadao Ando, "The Emotionally Made Architectural Spaces of Tadao Ando," *The Japan Architect* (April, 1980), p.42.

<sup>82</sup> This "illogical" gap has a deep root in Zen Buddhism, and is first all the suspending of the functions of the rational and assertive mind as well as the logic of linguistic meaning. Roland sheds some light on this and writes: "The whole Zen wages a war against the prevarication of meaning. We know that Buddhism baffles the fatal course of any assertion (or of any negation) by recommending that one never be caught up in the following propositions: *this is A – this is not*



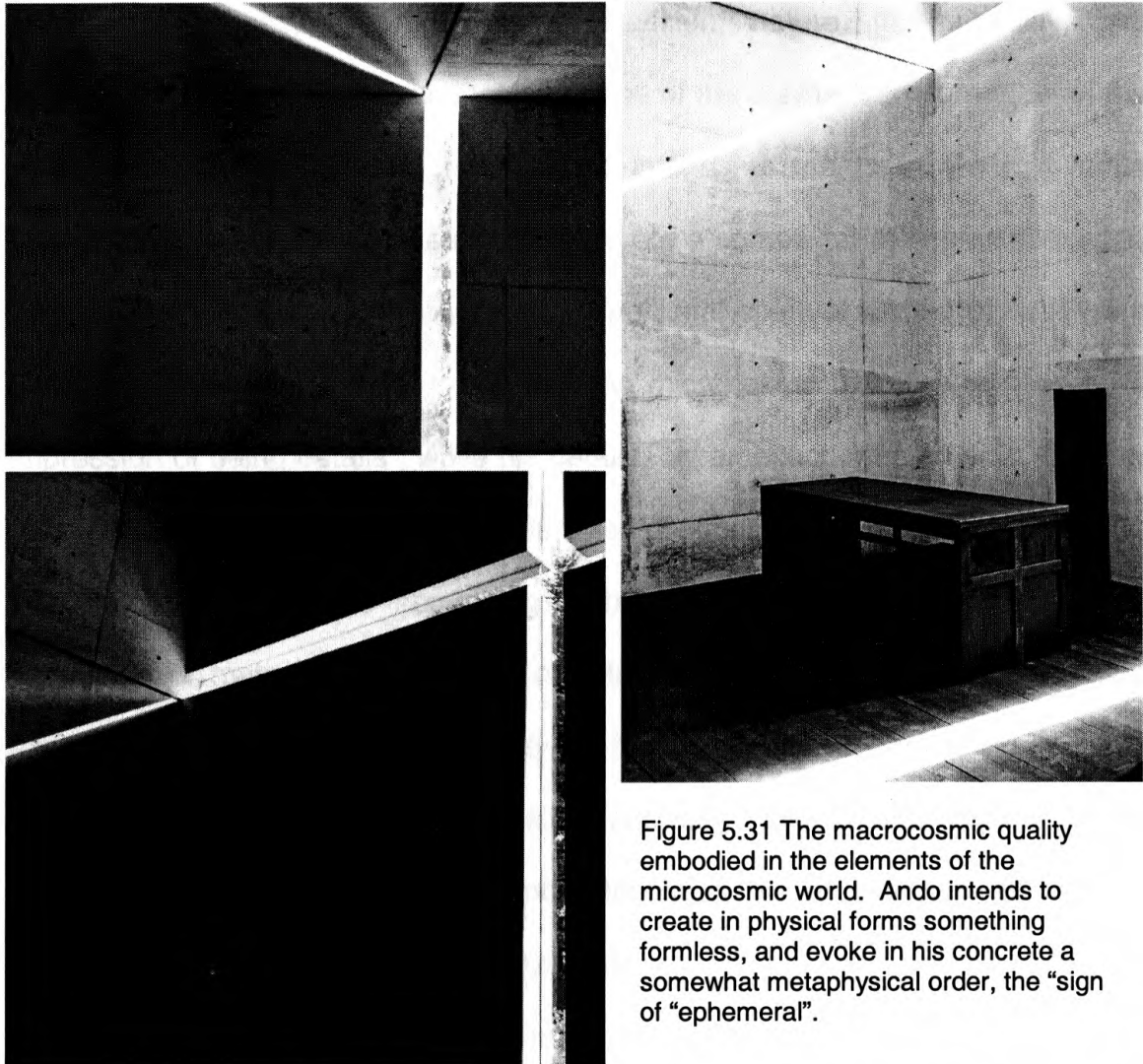


Figure 5.31 The macrocosmic quality embodied in the elements of the microcosmic world. Ando intends to create in physical forms something formless, and evoke in his concrete a somewhat metaphysical order, the “sign of “ephemeral”.

In fact, we are able to perceive in the Church of the Light more clearly than elsewhere, Ando’s intention of rejecting every absolute or dichotomy, but instead articulating the dual existence within the gap between two opposites. In this work, the idea gap is first of all predicated in his paradoxical attitude towards material, the gap between materiality and immateriality, in which there is a strong commitment not to concrete’s permanence, solidity, and stability as an

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*A – this is both A and not A – this is neither A nor not-A. Now this quadruple possibility corresponds to the perfect paradigm as our structural linguistics has framed it (A- not-A – neither A nor not-A(zero degree) A and not-A (complex degree))* in other words, the Buddhist way is precisely that of the obstructed meaning: the very Arcanum of signification, that is, the paradigm, is rendered impossible.” Roland Barthes, “Exemption from Meaning,” in *Empire of signs* (London: J. Cape, 1983, c1982), p. 73.

autonomous object, but rather to its transient nature, its mutability, and impermanence, as if it were an instant wedge of the eternal transformation of the phenomenal world. In other words, Ando intends to create in physical forms something formless and evokes in his concrete a somewhat metaphysical order, as a “sign of ephemeral” recognized by traditional spiritual aestheticism (Figure 5.31). As Maki puts it, Ando’s building, the microcosms themselves “gives the impression of being details”, while his details, his architectural elements, “appear to gain macrocosmic quality and significance”(Bognar, 1985, p.307). Yet for Ando, this immaterial, formless something is by no means achieved through the simulation of material for the sake of fiction, but instead this fiction is a due expression of an authentic materiality he has struggled so hard to pursue. His methodology in materiality is thus simultaneously rational and illogical, being realistic yet imbued with fiction. Ando describes his architecture as the *ma* between reality and fiction (Ando, 2000, p.9):

I neither undertake rational handling of architectural strictly in the realm of reality, nor attempt a ‘fabrication’ whereby an architecture is solely infused with fiction. Rather, I want to instill fiction in the core of the real, and to create de-familiarized space where fiction informs everyday.

In the Church of the Light, Ando intends to evoke through his poetic rendering of concrete a total distinctive idea of the sacred. Whereas in Western thought, the holy is considered to be transcendental and immortal, Ando informs us that the holy is transparent, in truth no less than the concrete reality of this phenomenal world, which like human being, is living in a process of endless creation, destruction and regeneration. Ando alludes to this: “Though we would pray for that beauty to endure, nothing in this world is immortal, and there is,

finally, no more apt symbol of our yearning for the eternal than that fades in an instant.”(Ando, 1995b, p.474). For Ando, this sensibility of *sabi* aesthetic is vividly projected in the transience assumed by his reinforced concrete.

## Space, Time, and (Twi)Light

In the second chapter, the traditional Japanese sense of *ma* was interpreted in terms of the one entity of space-time. In temporal terms, the sense of *ma* conveys two distinctive cognitions of time, the cyclical time and the time of flux, informed by Shintoism and Buddhism respectively. In relation to space making, the cyclical time accords with nature's observable and rhythmic movement and is thereby apprehended through natural events or phenomena; while the flux time, understood as a deflected and discontinuous flowing, is best embodied in the traditional "movement-oriented space," wherein fragmented spaces are linked in such a way as to turn, detour, and move ever onwards. A fine example in point is the traditional *sukiya* architecture, for which Ando has described the two distinctive time-related alterations of spatiality: "alterations depending on the time of the day, the changing climate, and the seasons of the year and alterations depending on the motion of the human observer" (Ando, 1982, p.11). Having recognized the cultural tradition, Ando consciously incorporates it into his works, wherein the sense of the cyclic time and the time of flux is reinterpreted in the "natural movement" and the "movement of the *shintai*," in Ando's phrase, the two essential components in the creating of spatiality (Ando, 1988, unpaginated):

By introducing nature and human movement into simple geometrical forms...What has been self-sufficient and still is transformed, by the addition of natural or human movement, into what is motion, and diverse views are thus superimposed in the eyes of the peripatetic observer.

I will examine the space-time context in terms of "human movement" in the second case study; and yet here, as will eventually be seen, it is the "natural

movement” that is particularly in evidence in shaping the space-time experience in the Church of the Light.

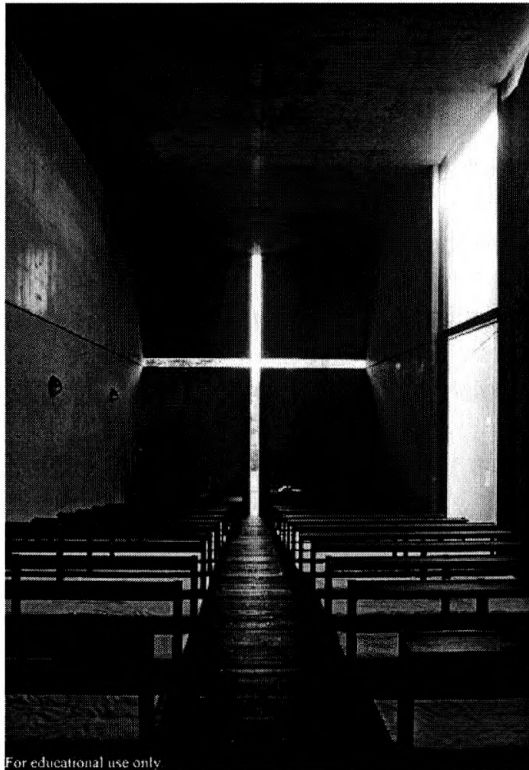
Since light is the principal natural element in this work, the concern for the transformation of light inevitably leads to the concern for the interaction of light and darkness. Light has no real existence of its own. Where there is a perception of light, there is side by side a perception of darkness, in contrast to which light is suddenly spoken of as existing, brilliant and powerful. Darkness on the other hand, enhancing the glory of light and imbuing it with dignity and power, is inherently a part of light. In these connections, the indefinite twilight, produced by a diversity of shadowy darkness and constantly rendered variable in the passing of time, is of richest expression and greatest significance. *Ma*, as the “gap” pulsating between light and darkness, is maintained by this twilight.<sup>83</sup> In the Church of the Light, Ando finds an affinity with the sense of *ma* shed in twilight, and assumes his position, “In my opinion, one important thing being lost from modern Japanese culture is a sense of the depth and richness of darkness,” continuing, “today, when all is cast in homogeneous light, I am committed to pursuing the interrelationship of light and darkness” (Ando, 1995b, p.471).

It is a space constructed of this twilight that Ando seeks to explore in the Church of the Light. The creation of space, which is intended to gather a fragment of the omnipresent light and sustain its presence in a fixed place, is first of all an effort to contain darkness. For Ando, this construction of darkness is

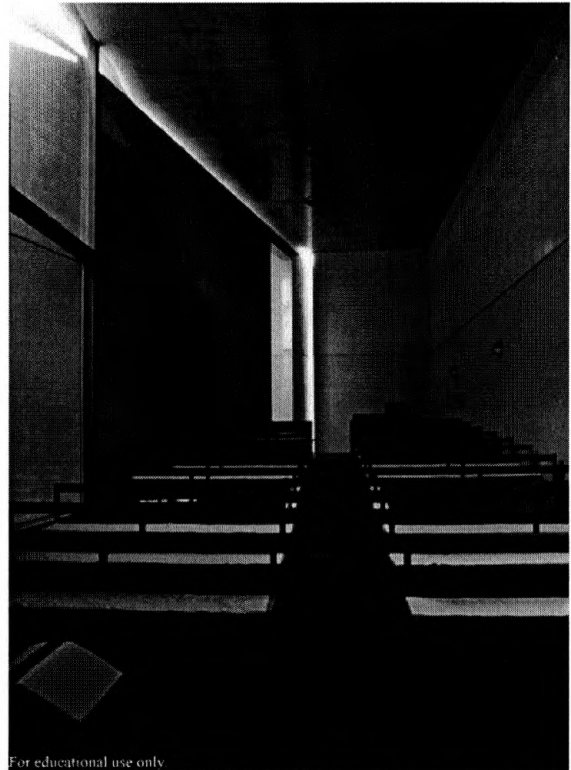
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<sup>83</sup> For information on *Ma* and twilight, see “Space of Twilight” in the first chapter of this work. As stated before, the traditional *sukiya* space has pursued an immutable darkness within its interior, where diffusive light fades into the profound tranquility of darkness, depicting a space of delicate chiaroscuro subtly changing within time flow. The essential quality of space, in terms of luminosity, resides in a perpetual state of twilight resulted from such effects, best described by Jun’ichirō Tanizaki in his novel *In Praise of Shadow*. Jun’ichirō Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows* (New Haven, Conn.: Leete’s Island Books, c1977), pp.17-23.





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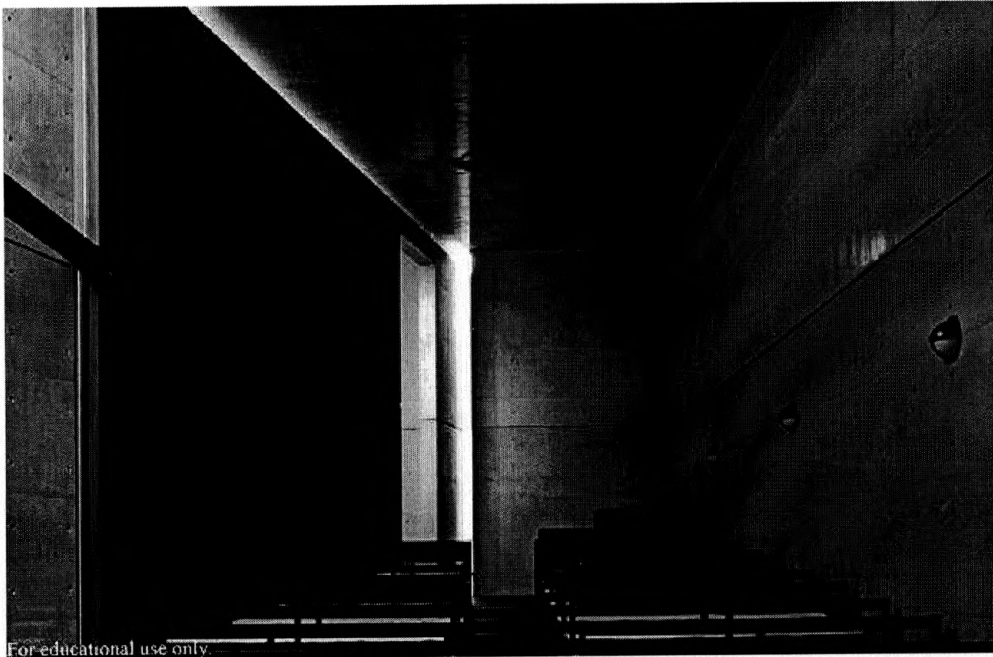
Figure 5.32 Space of twilight. The gaps within the chapel are carefully controlled as so to break light down into individual particles, manipulates its density, and yet gather darkness behind.

predicated in the austere concrete box enclosed by thick walls, which deposits the substance of darkness inside while turning its back on the undifferentiated light outside. Like the traditional teahouse, in which the size and numbers of the openings are strictly controlled so as to break light down into individual particles, Ando then cautiously installs gaps upon each plane of the chapel to slice off pieces of homogeneous light, sculpting light into form, manipulating its density, while gathering darkness behind. Through this purification, individual light exhibits its vitality in the way that reveals every minor deviation with the passage of time and acquires its actuality against stillness and the unchanging datum of darkness (Figure 5.32). At an intersection of this kind, light and darkness are architecturalized to a taut dialogue and brought to a new existence in the

immutable status of twilight. By virtue of these gaps, the concrete shell is turned out into complex sundials.

Further evocation of the twilight is effected by the interior concrete walls, so precisely wrought as to constitute a delicate device, like that of the shoji screen, registering light and diffusing it into the darkness of space. Made in a single neutral gray, the concrete neither enhances the brilliance of light nor completely devours it but rather sinks the radiating light into subdued mood. The pale glow of fading rays lingers on the dusky concrete and realizes delicate surfaces of a variety of shadows that eventually dissolve into the depth of darkness. As the concrete effects its dematerialization under the impact of light so that the impression of substance is removed, there remains the void alone, a differentiated void informed by the monochromatic gradation of twilight. Space is born and is perceived identical with the phenomenon of twilight.

In other words, Ando has developed in the chapel, not a physical space judged in terms of absolute length or height, but rather a phenomenal space sensed through the indefinite depth of twilight. Having no existence as a three-dimensional entity, the twilight space is perceived in the sense of *ma* and *oku*, the two prime modes of structuring space and time so much that they determine and even create the resultant spatiality of the twilight. Like that in the traditional Japanese house, the twilight space of the chapel assumes a contrapuntal coexistence of light, shadow, and darkness that physically mix with but do not cancel out each other and work to transform volumetric, sculptural space into planar, pictorial space (Figure 5.33). At the innermost core of the twilight is the



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Figure 5.33 Two-dimensional pictorial space. Space loses its physical, volumetric appearance, and is transformed a differentiated Void of Monochromatic Gradation, a phenomenal space perceived in the sense of *ma*.

image of darkness related to substance and tranquility, whereas at its outset the image of light is related to void and transience.<sup>84</sup> In the ubiquitous void in between then, there remains a spectrum-continuum of shadows from light ones to heavy ones, encircling, connecting and separating each other, subtly divided, determining the spectrum interval between translucency and opacity, presence and absence, substance and void. In these connections, it is the spacing factor *ma*, in its dual nature of existence that constitutes the primary dispersive force at work within the twilight space and determines the phenomenological order of the twilight space. Inherent in this twilight spectrum, there is a movement in depth, which mentally and experientially leads the person inside the chapel to an indeterminate, geometrically indefinable core wherein space together with the

<sup>84</sup> It should be noted that in the traditional Japanese house, *oku* is closely associated with shadow and darkness, which provides depth and evokes the spirit of the building. With regard to *oku* – darkness, see “*Oku* in Traditional Residence,” in the third chapter of this work.

delicate fading light converges to zero. It is therefore the sense of *oku* that serves to describe the inner structure of the chapel space, the process in which its twilight unfolds itself in depth and subjectivity (Figure 5.34).



Figure 5.34 The sense of *ma* and *oku* in twilight space. The spacing factor *ma* constitutes the primary dispersive force at work within the twilight space; while the ubiquitous darkness enables the perception of *oku*, which turns out to describe the inner structure twilight space.

Yet embodied from the outset of the twilight structure, there is the event of light, transient and ephemeral. Abstracted from nature, light assumes a ceaseless movement as it exists in the organic transformation of the natural world (Figure 5.35). Light, therefore, is the immediacy of time. With the gaps precisely intervened on the enclosing wall so as to register light's each alteration in intensity, angle, and direction depending on climate, season and the hour of day, the whole structure of twilight space is swayed, like a kaleidoscope, whereby the interrelationship of light, shadow, and darkness is constantly recreated and rearranged in a temporal, and not a spatial succession. This is the

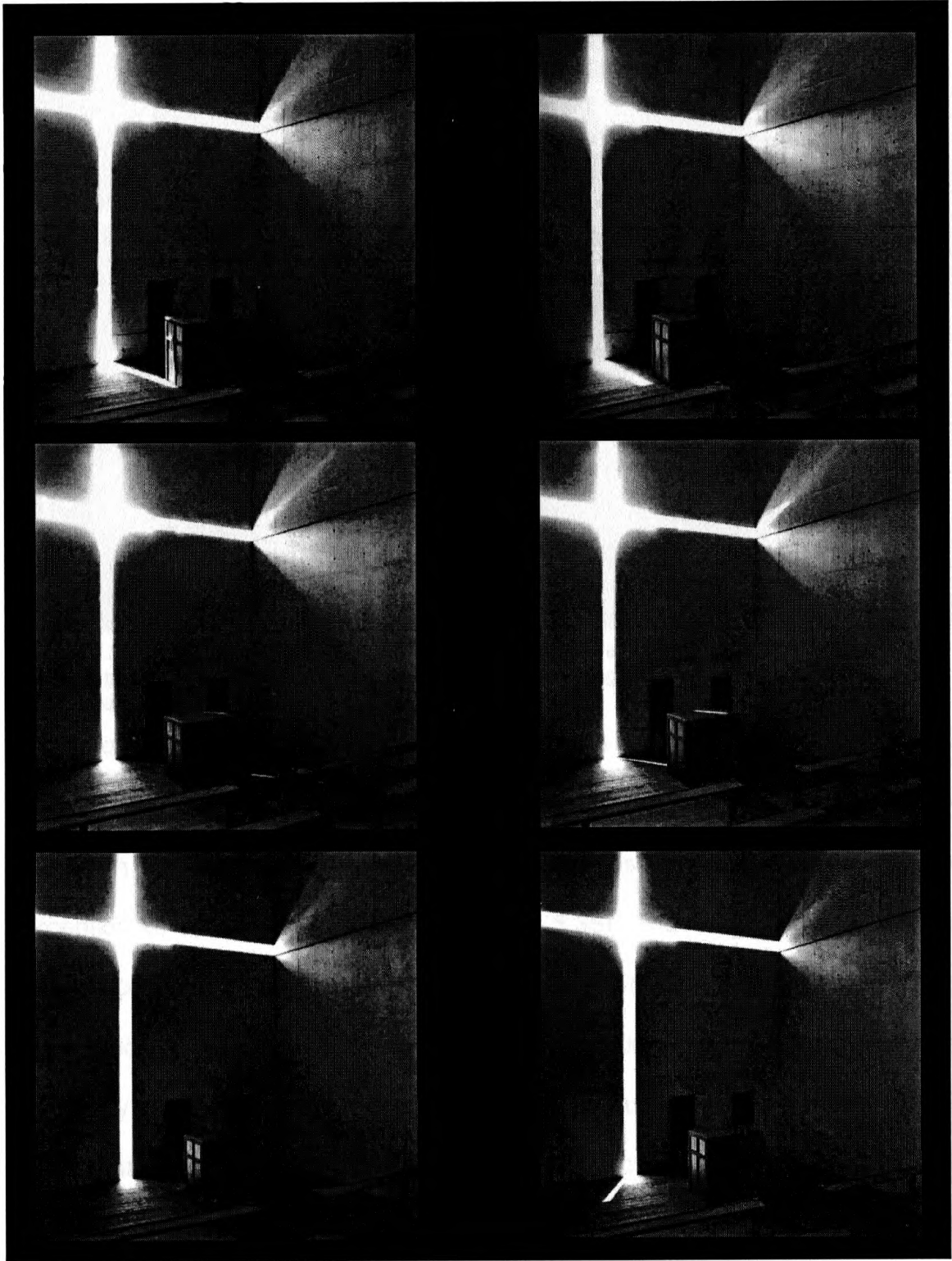


Figure 5.35 The interaction and transformation of space, time and natural light. It is the sense of *ma* that generates a time-structured experience of space and phenomenon.





Figure 5.36 The indeterminate *oku* existing along the temporal scales. Space never begins mature, but always unfolds in time something new, something unforeseen, which stimulates the perception of the indeterminate *oku*.

theory of *ma* that generates a time-structured experience of space and phenomenon. As a result, the chapel space never begins mature, but always unfolds in time something new, something unforeseen, which stimulates the perception of the indeterminate *oku* (Figure 5.36). The twilight space has no absolute center and no geometric order; its true determinant factor is that of time. And based on this, the existence of *oku*, unlike a fixed center, is always freely located by a number of continuous time scales, halted here and there, and linked by an intangible line constructed by our subjectivity and its consecutive responses to it. Within the Church of the Light, one's body and spirit is thus punctuated by the twofold articulation of reality created by *ma* - what is static and what is living, what is seen and what is unseen. This persistent sensation

experienced in the chapel space is some sort of feeling of discovery as one exists in time, and the space is always awaiting the involvement of human beings. On the surface, the Church of the Light appears to be simply triple-cube geometry. Yet as one delves into the depth of its inner structure implicitly in *oku*, it appeals to the deepest level of human spirit, and this is Ando's ultimate objective of creation.

As something presumed by the duality of *ma*, Ando's concern for the transience or temporal context of architecture inevitably leads to the concern for its opposite counterpart – the eternity of architecture and human spirit. Like the traditional Japanese Shintoists, who regain divine and life origin at the interval within the periodic renewal of space and time, Ando incorporates into his architecture the rhythmic alteration and movement of nature, and in so doing, aims at a space perpetually renewed within the perceivable cycle of time. Within this ceaseless rebirth of space, time, and nature, people will thus find the resonant implication of the origin and eternity for human spirit. And it is evidently at work in the twilight of the Church of the Light, which, though transient and elusive, conveys the perfection of space at each moment of glimpse as to imprint on one's mind an eternal character. Ando writes: "I introduce nature – light, wind, and water – within a geometrical and ordered architecture, thereby awakening it to life. Climatic changes in turn transform the condition of architecture from moment to moment...architectural expression is born that is capable of moving the human spirit and allows us to glimpse the eternal within the moment. The abode of the eternal is thus within he who perceives it" (Ando, 1995b, 474).

## CHAPTER 6

### EYCHANER / LEE HOUSE

#### Center and Periphery

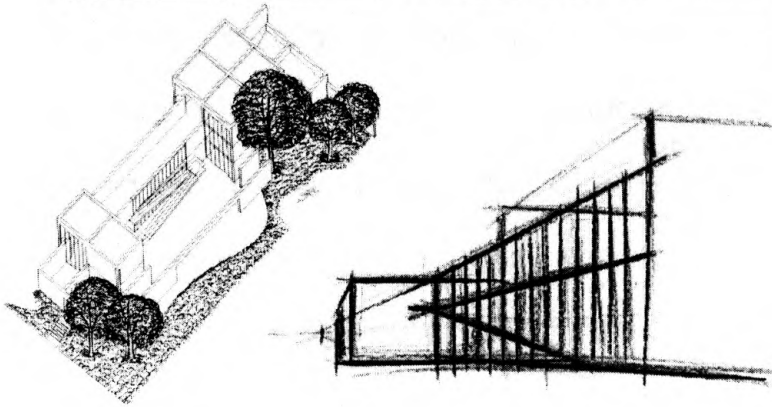
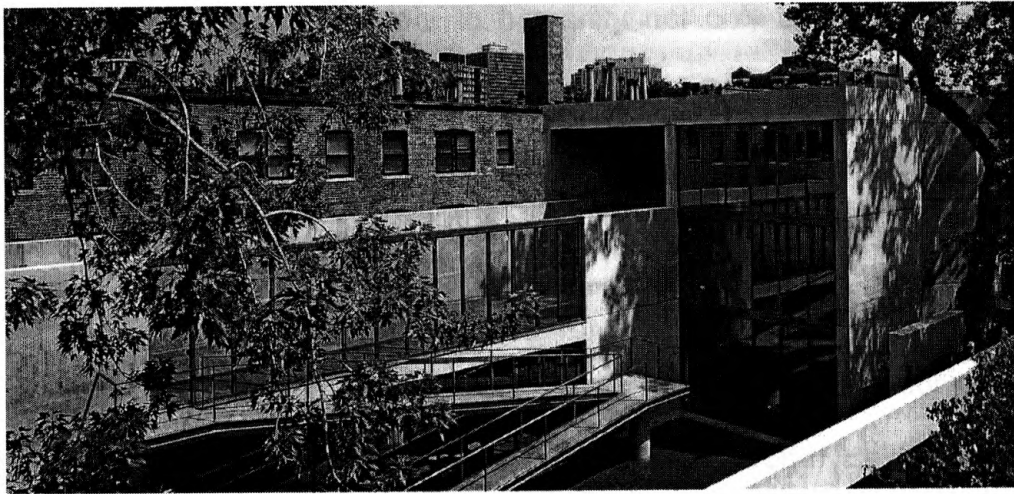


Figure 6.1 Urban context and space configuration of the Eychaner / Lee House, Chicago.

The Eychaner/Lee House is built in a residential area adjacent to Lincoln Park, in downtown Chicago (Figure 6.1). Ando received the commission for the house in 1992, and the construction work was completed in May 1998. It was Ando's first building in the United States, yet gave him the wide recognition that stated his architectural practice here. It followed this work with two public structures: the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts in St. Louis and the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, finished in 2001 and 2002, respectively.

For Ando, dwelling is not something merely utilitarian but is inextricably linked to the sacred in the sense that it invites true mental repose and spiritual enrichment. Both church and house demand the establishment of a centralized symbolic domain from which human beings identify their existential position in the world. Such a strong commitment to humanity not only aligns Ando with the Japanese tradition inspired by Zen Buddhism, in which an active and creative participation in the fundamental life activities assume an existential resonance, but also reflects his affinity with the Western ideology suggested by Martin Heidegger. In his essay *Building Dwelling Thinking*, Heidegger argues that building and dwelling are not separate activities but essentially connected to each other as fundamental to human existence in the world (Heidegger, 1971, pp.145-161). According to Heidegger, building is dwelling, and just as “the fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving (of the fourfold),” earth and sky, divinities and mortals, genuine building as dwelling gives rise to form and meaning of existence in the presence of the fourfold (ibid., p.149).

Unfortunately, with contemporary consumerization and urbanization, these two basic acts of human beings have been increasingly involved in the chain of “end and means,” in the words of Heidegger, wherein superficial convenience and material affluence is sought at the expense of existential meanings, resulting in the endless production of meaninglessness (ibid., p.149). It is at this point that Ando has grasped the essential oneness of building and dwelling, the existential foothold of architecture that has been devalued in modern civilization. For Ando, the act of building is no less than the creation of a fixed point. While such a point,

which man and architecture could refer to, no longer exists in the modern city the dwelling represents a centralized domain, a minimum existential world, in which we are liberated from the alienating no-man's-land of modern megapolis, and in which our humanity is regained. In the Lee House, this ideology is predicated on layering the peripheral space, thereby creating an introspective domain strongly centripetal in orientation.

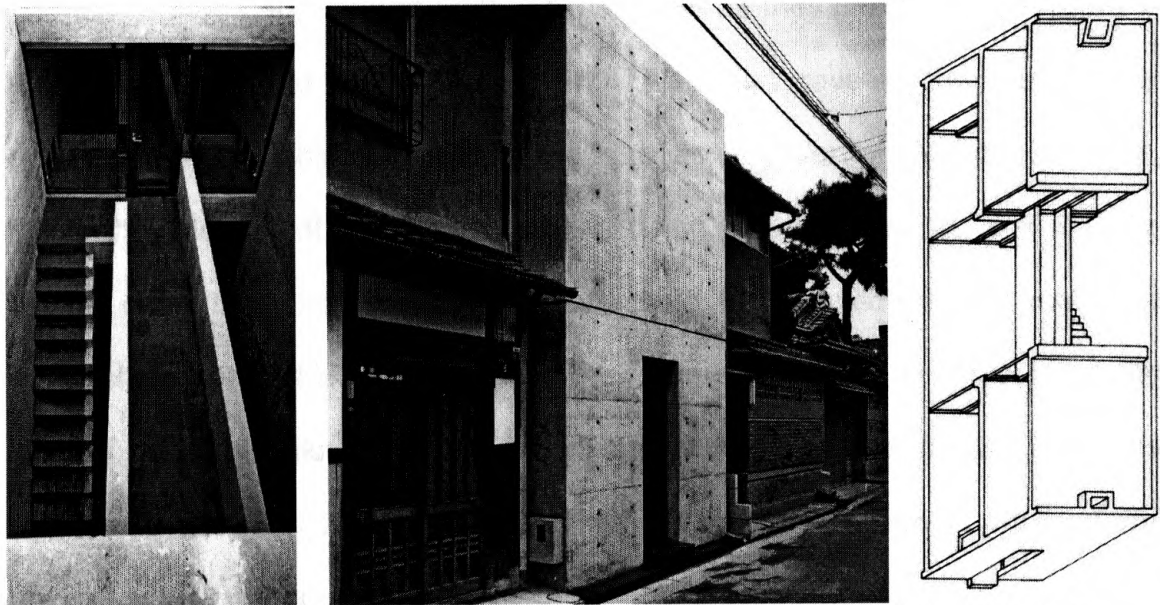


Figure 6.2 Row House (Azuma Residence), Sumiyoshi, Osaka, 1975-1976. (Left) Central court with open stair and bridge; (Middle) Facade on street side; (Right) Axonometric, tripartite scheme of a "close/open/closed" pattern.

In order to clarify Ando's approach and concept in this building, it is necessary to consider the extraordinary example of Sumiyoshi Row House (1976), a touchstone for our case study (Figure 6.2).<sup>85</sup> To build a place for living, Ando's first act is to wrap the entire site periphery with concrete walls. Ando then divides the concrete box into three segments of equal size, and disregarding the extreme tightness of the site, Ando generously sacrifices the central one to a void

<sup>85</sup> The building is also called Azuma Residence. Located among the chaotic sprawl of Osaka's older residential district, this townhouse is a surprisingly small building occupying less than 60 square meters.



open to sky. The house thus consists of two closed blocks flanking an open court at the innermost part, generating a centralized spatial formation formulated by a tripartite scheme in a “closed/open/closed” pattern.

Ando has endowed the innermost space with the closest contact with the exterior. In the court of monastic bareness, people are granted a space of presence wherein they confront nature directly and are almost obliged to harmonize their daily life with vagaries of climate as they pass from one room to another through the unsheltered court. This effort reveals the meaning of dwelling for Ando, which is not about the bourgeois comfort or ideal convenience, but as the evidence of a corporeal, sentient being alive in the world. In all, it is the central court that fixes the existential foothold for architecture and man and establishes the spirit-life order for dwelling. Although this is a simplest case, the idea of “internalization of the exterior” and its “closed/open/closed” scheme testifies to a spatial archetype, which will eventually be seen to be implicitly present in the Lee House.

As aforementioned, in his formation of a centripetal space Ando has consciously manipulated the traditional sense of *oku*. In connection to the physical spatial layout, *Oku* emphasizes an invisible depth and gives significance to the innermost space of dwelling; metaphysically, this idea of innermost space signifies the presence of spirituality and thereby the original point of existence. Often located in long narrow urban lots, the traditional merchant’s house (known as *machiya*) of Ando’s hometown Osaka, has always concealed a court garden or a light court at its innermost part, which serves as the central core of the

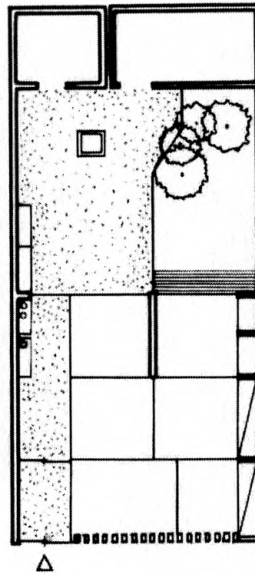


Figure 6.3 A traditional Kyoto townhouse.  
(Left) The entrance suggests the depth of the house and the existence of *oku*, invisible from the outside.  
(Right) The plan shows an open court at the inner most part of the long narrow house.

house and offers a place for contact with nature (Figure 6.3). Seen from street side, the house exhibits an invisible depth and enables us to perceive the existence of *oku*. Ando's scheme of the "closed/open/closed" and the idea of internalization of the exterior are clearly influenced by such roots. Having received the existential foothold from cultural tradition, Ando has wedged it in contemporary context, and translated it into his own spatial syntax.

Paralleling with the concept of *oku*, Ando has also brought in his space creation another singular feature from cultural tradition, the concept of *ma*, which is best represented in the Kidosaki house (Figure 6.4). This house can be considered as an architectural opposite of Sumiyoshi house, from which it, at the same time, evolved as Ando himself acknowledges. In contrast to Sumiyoshi House, the innermost core of Kidosaki house is articulated by a four-grid, closed cube, from which interstitial spaces of open courts created in the sense of *ma* disperse out to "act as buffer zones between the units and the central place of domestic activity" (Ando, 1989d, p.36). The overall configuration is constituted by

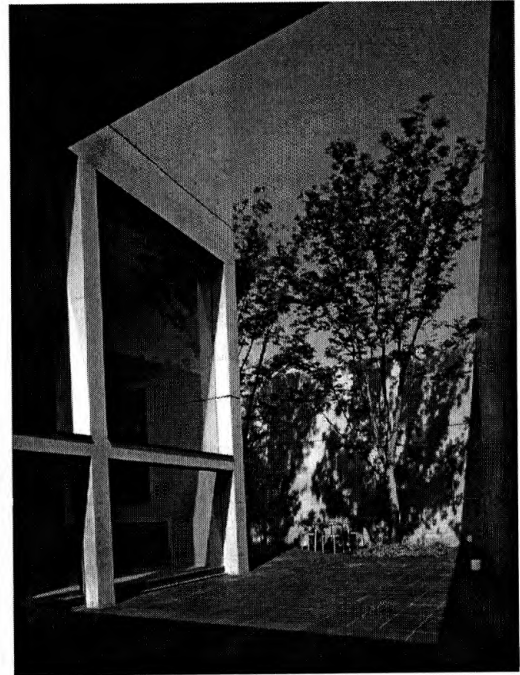
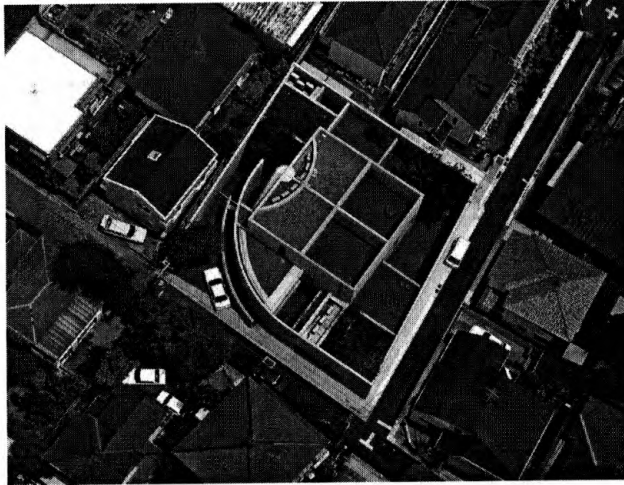


Figure 6.4 Kidosaki House, Tokyo, 1982-86. (Left) The configuration exhibits a bipartite scheme of an “open/closed” pattern; (Right) The courtyard at the periphery of the house.

a bipartite scheme of an “open/closed” pattern, by comparison with the tripartite pattern at Sumiyoshi. In fact, these two spatial configuration schemes characterize Ando’s method of articulating the territory of site and can be identified in all his residential works – all are variations on the two prototypes.<sup>86</sup>

And now, I have come to the position of being able to analyze, with the aid of *oku* and *ma*, and these two archetypal schemes, the spatial configuration of the Eychaner/Lee House. Here, twin blocks face each other and enclose an open court at the innermost core of the site, following the tripartite scheme of a “closed/open/closed” pattern at Sumiyoshi (Figure 6.5 A). Still outside of these two closed blocks, four smaller courts, two on each side, wrap around the concrete blocks and constitute interstitial spaces layered along the periphery of the site, assuming the bipartite scheme of an “open/closed” pattern like that of

<sup>86</sup> Koji Taki presents a detailed study on Ando’s articulation of site base on these two spatial schemes. See Koji Taki, “Minimalism or Monotony? A Contextual Analysis of Tadao Ando’s Method,” in Tadao Ando. *Tadao Ando: Buildings, Projects, Writings* (New York: Rizzoli, 1984), pp. 13-16. Much the same discussion is also available in Hiroshi Watanabe, “Tadao Ando: The Architecture of Denial,” *The Japan Architect* (May, 1982), p.53.

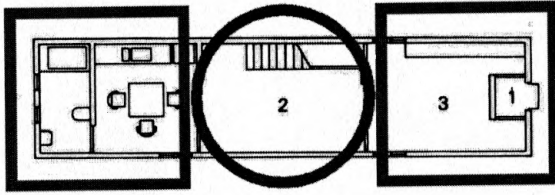


Diagram A. Tripartite scheme,  
“Closed/Open/Closed” pattern  
Sumiyoshi House, Osaka.

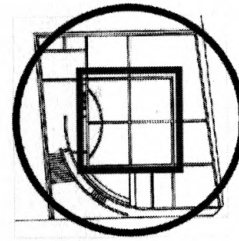


Diagram B. Bipartite scheme,  
“Open/Closed” pattern  
Kidosaki House, Tokyo.

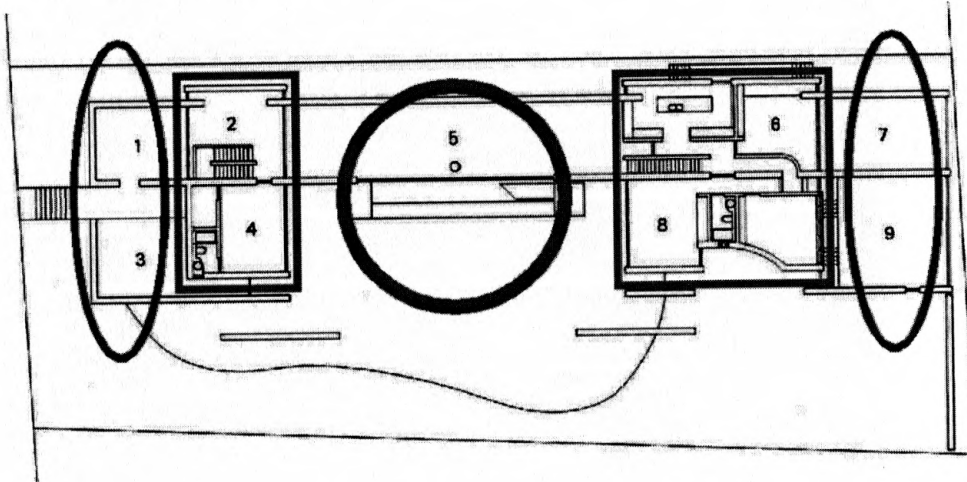
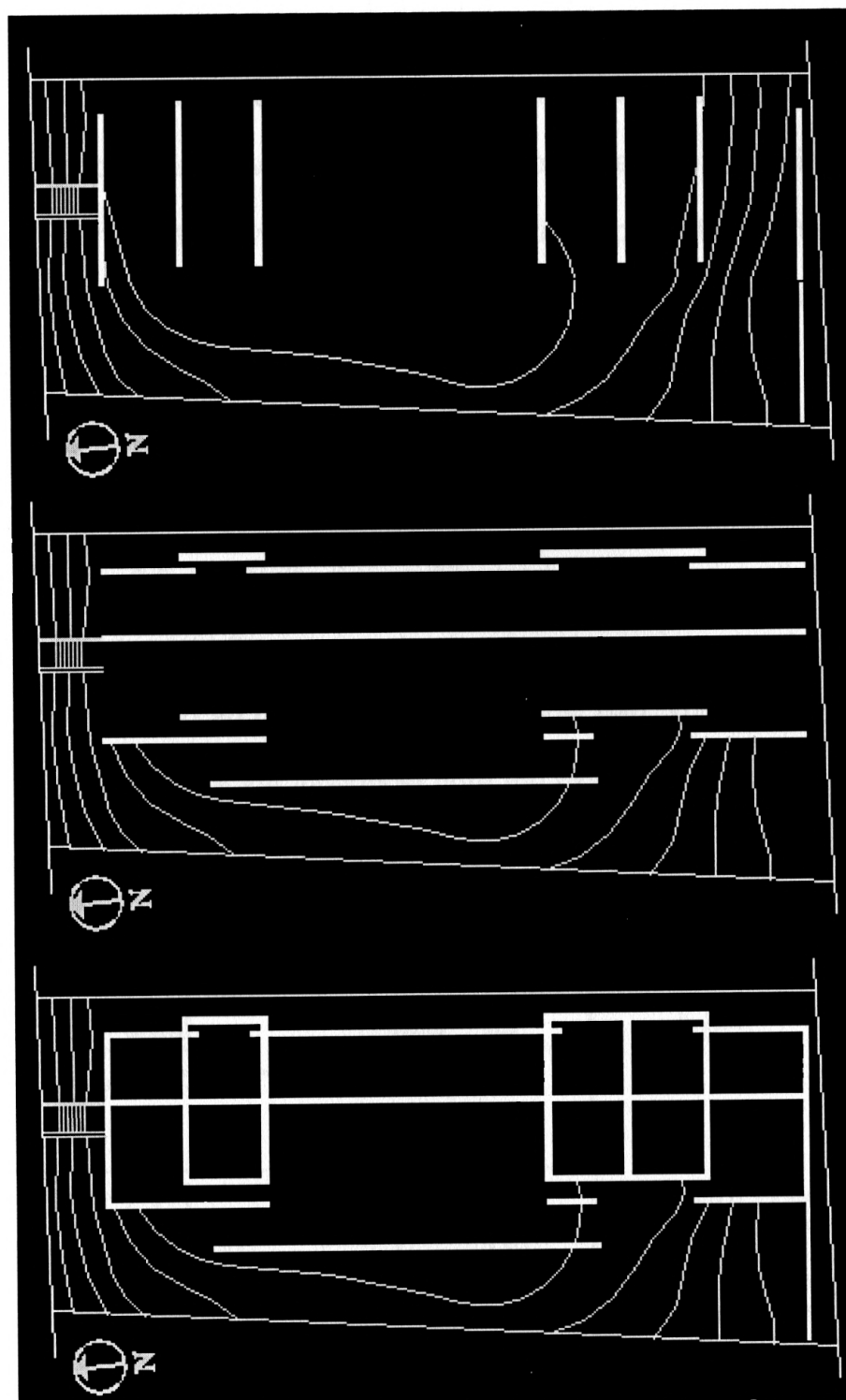


Diagram C. Quintuple scheme,  
“Open/Closed/Open/Closed/Open” pattern,  
Eychaner / Lee House, Chicago.

Figure 6.5 Three schemes of spatial configuration. The Sumiyoshi and Kidosaki houses represent two different types of scheme. Lee house combines the previous two schemes.

the Kidosaki house (Figure 6.5 B). Based on this analysis, the Lee House may be justified as the juxtaposition of these two schematic plans, and ultimately, the overall spatial layout of the house characterizes a quintuple scheme of an “open/closed/open/closed/open” pattern (Figure 6.5 C).

For Ando, the first step towards the building of a place for dwelling is the delineation of territory. In this process, Ando’s habitual technique of space layering, something derived from the traditional concept of *oku* and *ma*, is particularly in evidence here. For the purpose of this study, let’s take a look at



A. The disposition of Walls in north-south direction

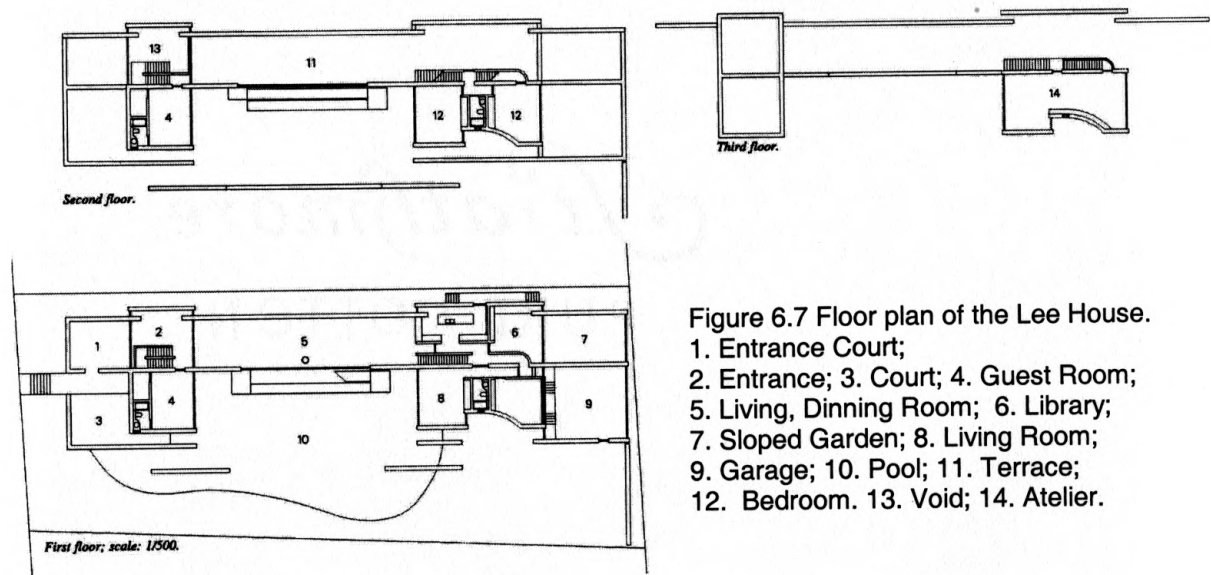
B. The disposition of walls in east-west direction

C. The overall spatial configuration articulated by walls.

Figure 6.6  
Architecturalization of site by walls



(Figure 6.6 A & B) in which the whole building is “deconstructed” into matrix of walls or spatial layers in lengthwise and widthwise array separately. In each direction, parallel walls are arranged upon the ground of site, generating among them interstitial layers of somewhat rhythmic permutation that eventually open up towards the site interior. When walls in these two directions are superimposed, the space formation of the Lee house is reflected in this orthogonal system of walls in which three distinctive layers of space continuum are arranged in the sequence that an outer space always seems to envelop another one inside (Figure 6.6 C). With the multilayered space and wall system, the exterior penetrates into the interior step by step, producing a centripetal space structure converging to an open court at the inmost part, suggesting the *oku*. Meanwhile, Ando has given the innermost core the closet relationship to the exterior, a due expression of his internalization of the exterior.



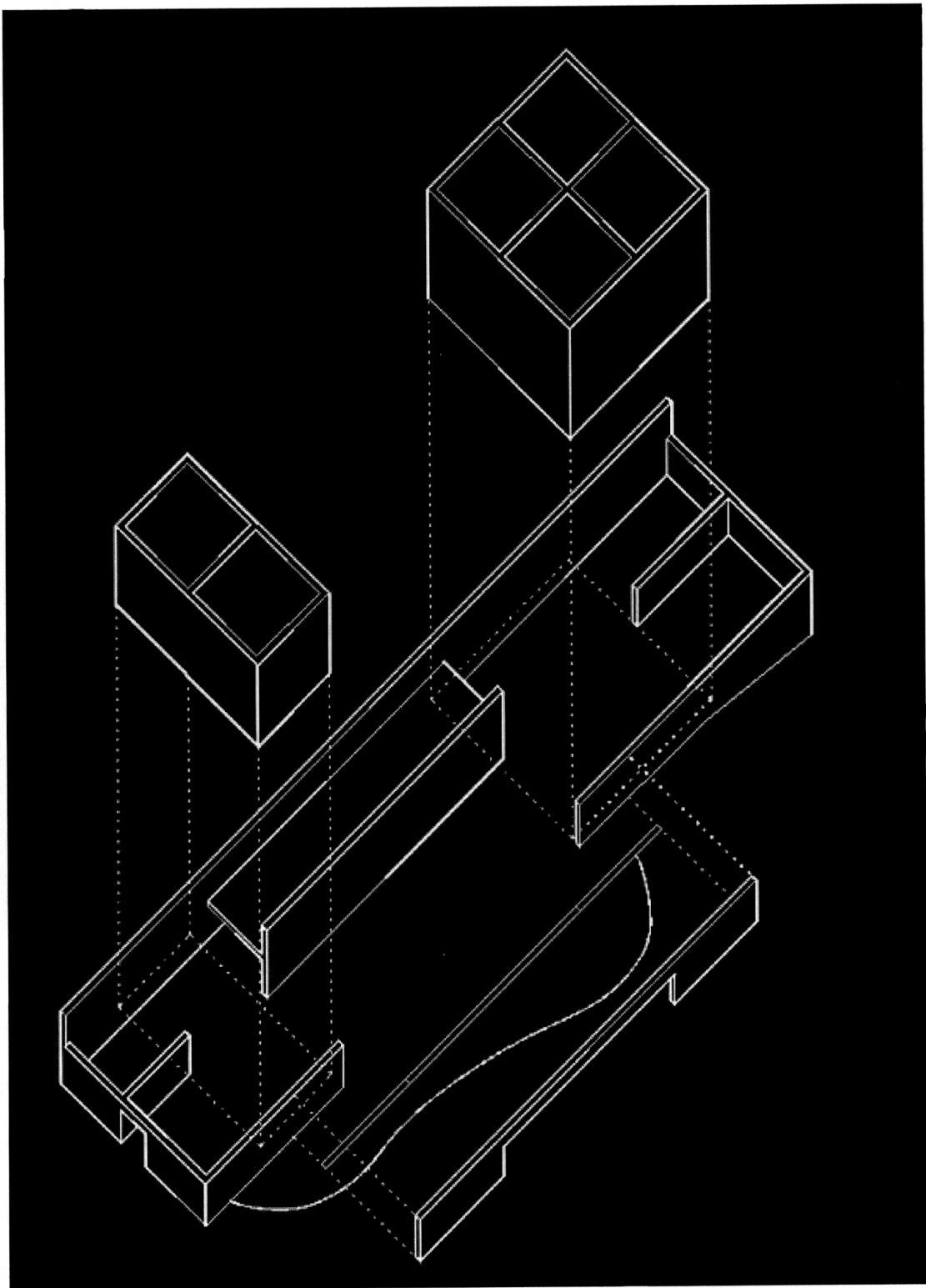


Figure 6.8 Axonometric of spatial volume configuration. The main volume is a cuboid, with a segment on the lateral side detached from the cuboid and standing immediately outside it. Two additional volumes are wedged on the main box.

Like the Sumiyoshi house, the primary volume here is a single concrete cuboid although the disposition of walls is more complex (Figure 6.7). In Sumiyoshi, Ando works with the method of “subtraction” as seen in the way that an open court is dug out from the triple-cube volume, leaving two closed blocks on the front and rear immediately to street side. If we examine the axonometric of the Lee house, we could see here Ando works by “addition,” wherein the two blocks are autonomous volumes being wedged at certain intermediary points of the main volume, and joined into a pair by an intermediary linkage (Figure 6.8).

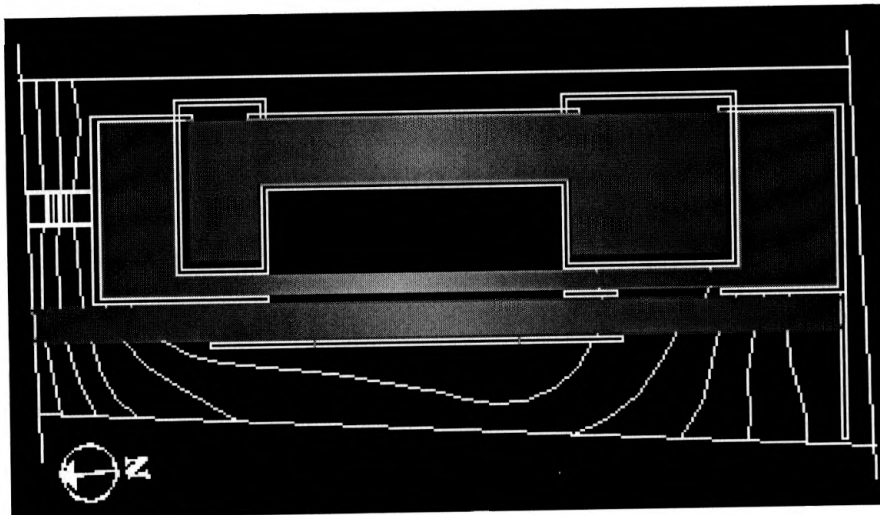


Figure 6.9 Spatial layers of the centripetal structure. Three distinctive spatial layers are deployed around the periphery, and envelope the central space at the innermost part.

The spatial result is that the central court is embraced by two U-shaped spatial layers on each side, with the twin blocks and their linkage as one layer, and all the leftover space within the main cuboid as another. Along the longitudinal axis therefore, the space configuration exhibits a rhythmic alteration of an “open/closed/open/closed/open” pattern. In addition to this, a third spatial layer is produced between the western boundary of the main box and an independent wall outside it. Ultimately, the spatial layout of the Lee house is formulated by these three spatial layers (Figure 6.9). While remaining mutually dependent,

each layer preserves individual syntactic meaning, functional or symbolic, in contributing to formation of the centripetal structure. In the following, I will examine each layer, in the order from outside in.

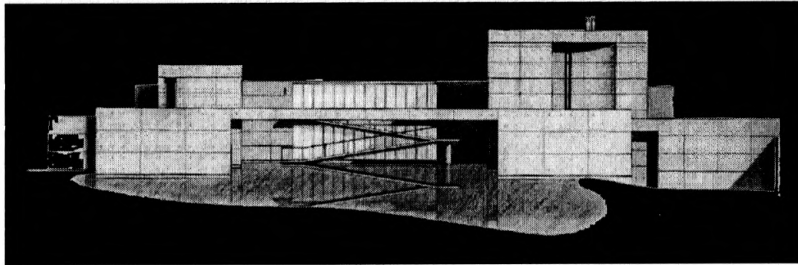


Figure 6.10 Western facade of Eychaner/Lee House. It shows the central court opens to the garden on the western side through the opening on facade.

The two principal territorial delineators of the Lee house are the concrete walls surrounding the perimeter of the main cuboid and the freestanding wall placed immediately outside it on the west. Unlike his early Japanese buildings, Sumiyoshi, for example, which are mainly of a closed spatial type turning inward to resist the often chaotic urban surrounding, the Lee house stands alone in a spacious and quiet residential site, which is planted with several large poplar trees on the western part, making a natural landscape garden for the house. In this respect, openness, not closedness, becomes the major theme, and the western boundary, as an interface between the house and the garden, plays a decisive role in building their relationship. The sense of enclosure is first of all mitigated by the large opening on the western wall, exposing the full length of the inner court to the landscape outside (Figure 6.10). However, this openness is immediately mediated by another wall layered further outside, which overlaps the boundary wall by 15ft on each side and leaves a crevice-like space in between. The spatial result is the “discontinuous continuity” that renders the inside-outside relationship more complex.

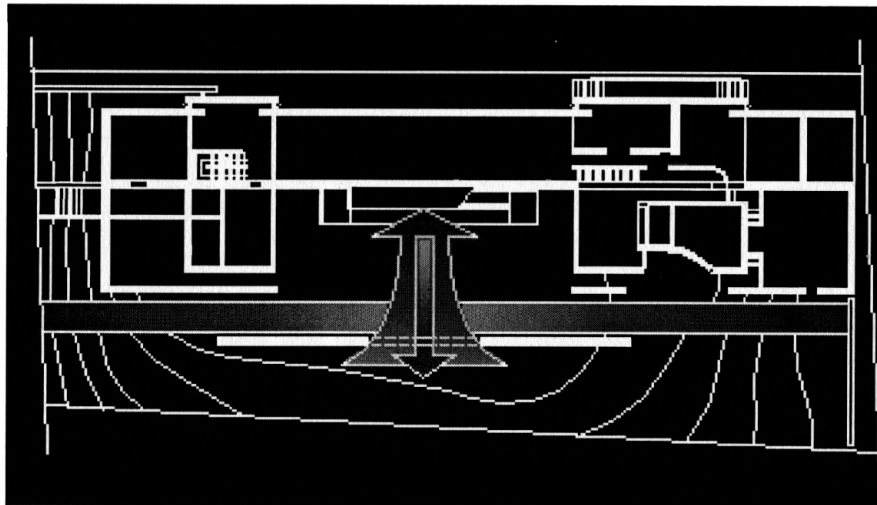


Figure 6.11 The first spatial layer of the centripetal formation. The “dual delineators” of the western boundary generates a crevice-like space in between, and the transaction of inward-outward force is expressed here.

But why should this be necessary? This effect of “dual delineators” could only be explained as the evidence of the struggle between inward and outward forces, a result of Ando’s almost over-sensitivity to physical context (Figure 6.11). Notwithstanding the force exploding from inside out, the autonomous piece stands out as if a segment has been pushed off from the main boundary and escaped out of the primary volume. But this is not sufficient; the expansive force must pierce through the wall and fragmentate it into a frame-like element distinctive with the rest. Though the centripetal force remains supreme within the inner court, the yearning for communication with outside has resulted in an indefinite, almost invisible architectural boundary (Figure 6.12). And yet even here, these two walls do not obliterate themselves as delineators. The absence in the main boundary wall behind is a reminder to us of the form from which the freestanding piece was carved, and this powerful gesture sets one’s mind to reconstruct the original cuboid. The two delineators thus remain mutual dependent, demonstrating that the primary boundary is somewhere in between.





Figure 6.12 View from the garden on the west. The inside-outside relationship is fully expressed by the “dual delineator,” which creates an indefinite, almost invisible architectural boundary.

In these connections, this discontinuous continuity is seen for Ando as an essential attribute of *ma* that constitutes a void pause in mediating the opposites. The spatial gap left between the two walls simultaneously connects and separates inner court and outer garden, producing an ambiguous zone wherein the transaction of inward and outward force take place. Placing an additional delineator in front of the opening to the inner court, far from diminishing its openness, intensifies the relationship between the two. Meanwhile, the spatial gap adds a delicate layer enveloping the house and enhances the centripetal effect of overall spatial layout.

With the inner court as a central point for reference, the second spatial layer of the centripetal structure includes all the leftover spaces intervened between the two closed blocks and the periphery wall of the main cuboid (Figure 6.13). However, this spatial layer is discontinued at the courtside due to the expansive force outwards, and is thereby bisected into a pair of L-shape spatial segments located on north and south respectively. Ando has designated the

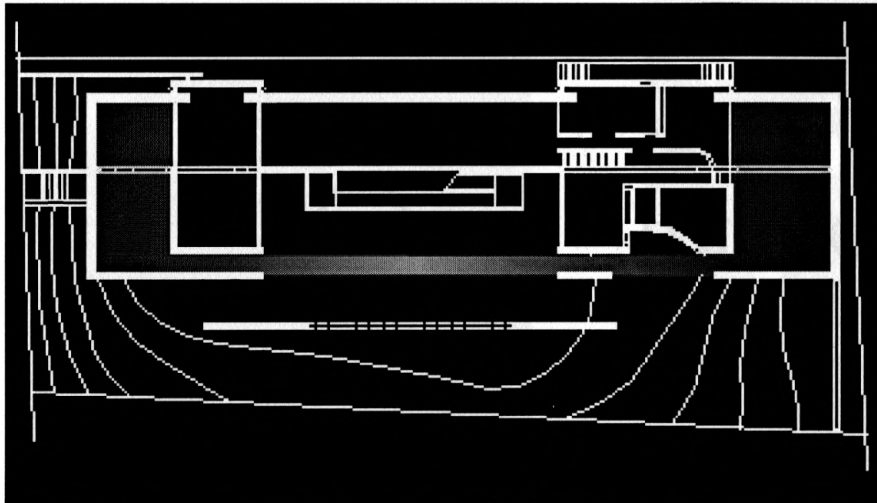


Figure 6.13 The second spatial layer of the centripetal formation. This layer generates interstitial spaces on the northern and southern side of the building, while is disconnected on the court side to allow the continuity between court and garden.

northern segment as two-linked court for the entry of the house, and subdivided the southern one into a sloped garden and garage. Both segments extend to wrap around a corner of the closed blocks, turning into a crevice-like space looking inward at the central court (Figure 6.14).

Except for the openings on the west as mentioned above, Ando has completely enclosed the rest of this spatial layer with bare concrete walls, making little concession to the outside world. This spatial layer acts as a buffer zone that protects the place for living from the perpetual siege of its urban surroundings. In this respect, the entrance court as a place for detachment and withdrawal plays a decisive role. Located on the north side, the entrance of the house confronts its adjacent street with an unarticulated, harsh concrete wall. On this deliberately undecorated face, there is no more than a single doorway, assuming the “absence of facade,” wherein nothing on the exterior signifies in the least what is contained at the heart of the structure (Figure 6.15). For Ando, this disconnection of inside and outside, reminiscent of the traditional *machiya* townhouse, is intended to evoke an invisible depth to the existential domain at

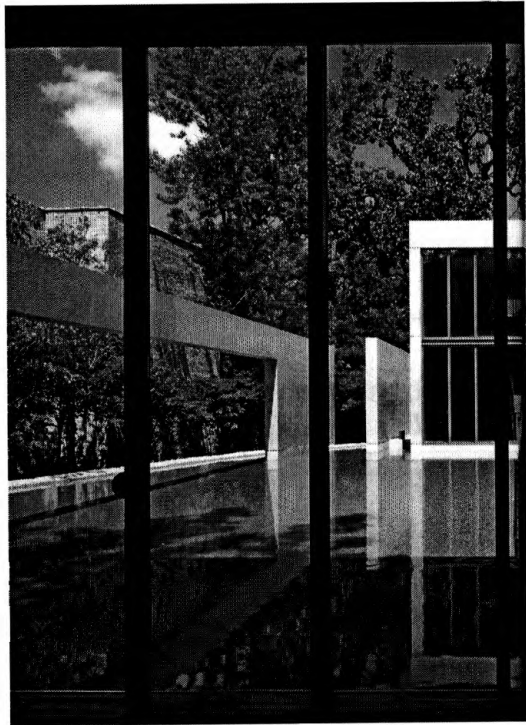


Figure 6.14 The Second Spatial Layer Seen from Inner Court. This spatial layer wraps part of the block, discontinued at the water court.

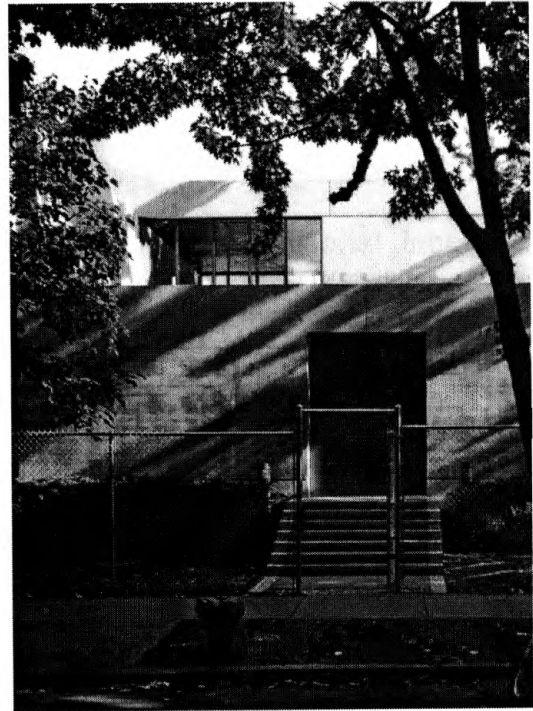


Figure 6.15 Facade and entrance. Facade is a bare concrete wall. In contrast to Figure 6.14, nothing outside implies inside.

the innermost place and enables one to perceive the mystical *oku* inside. At the same time, this unyielding design gesture reflects Ando's consistent aversion to the formal presence of contemporary city, in which visual saturation and ephemeral stimuli is pursued at the expense of substantial meaning, engendering a superficial expression.

Intrigued, the passerby wonder what is so precious protected inside? Ironically, however, the answer is nothing: merely empty spaces (Figure 6. 24). A courtyard of pure concrete walls and ground, no flowers, no greenery, devoid of functional use is presented to all who enter. Still nothing inside could be foreseen. The effect of this prevents an overall view of space and implies all the more an unseen realm ahead. As an interstitial space where one is detached from the city

and yet not allowed to enter the house, this entrance court is of great significance in the sense that it constitutes Ando's sentiment-fundamental space in which he reinterprets the traditional concept of *ma*. In creating a symbolic space of this kind, Ando has made reference to the entranceway of the traditional Japanese farmhouse which "is simultaneous symbolic and functional, since it is the place in which cooking is done and where farm-related work is done at night when daytime labor in the fields has ended" (Ando, 1977a, p.73). In much the same spirit, the entrance court of the Lee House is fundamentally associated with daily life of the dwellers in the way that it serves as an threshold between the city as the secular domain and the house as the sacred, a place where the dwellers go forth to and return from the world. Thereby, simple daily activities assume a ritual performance. Yet at the same time, it is a symbolic space. By transcending functional purpose and eliminating all excess, Ando intends to create an enclave of purity that restores the essential relationship between human beings and things on a deeper level. The courtyard informs a space of presence, in which man stands on the second earth of concrete and under a fragment of sky, and our existential meaning implicit in Heidegger's assertion is fully registered.<sup>87</sup> In other words, it is in the dual nature of existence, sentimental/fundamental, symbolic/functional, that the court space suggests the essential attribute of *ma*.

On the other hand, this second spatial layer, in relation to the spatial context of the building, may be identified as significant on the ground that it

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<sup>87</sup> According to Heidegger, mortals dwell in the way they preserve the fourfold (to save the earth, to receive the sky, to await the divinities, to escort mortals) in its essential being, its presence. Dwelling, insofar as it keeps or secures the fourfold in things, is as this keeping, a building. Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York, Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 150-151

signifies a new spatial syntax that Ando develops in the Lee House and, in so doing, implies a break from the habitual scheme of his past. In Sumiyoshi and most of Ando's early works, the building periphery is maintained by absolutely closed blocks looking inward, forming a "closed" type. In the Lee house, Ando has reversed this spatial pattern by opening up the periphery towards nature. Such a move demonstrates that Ando has eventually explored an outward orientation and a nexus with urban surroundings without at all relinquishing their centripetal character. With regard to the physical nature of the forecourt space, it is possible, though not essential, to remark its referential attribute to the traditional *en* space of *sukiya* house (Figure 4.14). Layered around the house periphery and opened to garden, the *en* space serves as a "buffer zone" that simultaneously connects and separates the interior and exterior.<sup>88</sup> In fact, the spatial formation of *Sukiya* may be considered as an architectural opposite of the traditional *machiya* that begets the Sumiyoshi House. In the Lee house, Ando incorporates the idea of this gray space, since the same spatial ambiguity of *en* is effected in the peripheral layer of the building. Yet at a time when the abundance of earth has already been consumed in contemporary urbanization, Ando opens it to sky, which in any case is seen as an irreducible and essential natural element. This gesture shows that Ando has attempted to break the banal "closed type" of the past, and his self-realization that "open" instead of "closed," "relation" instead of "rejection" assumes a more promising prospect, as Hiroshi Watanabe criticizes, "the closed type alone constitutes a dead end, without possibilities for

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<sup>88</sup> The boundary of the traditional *sukiya* house is delineated by the *en*, or *en-gawa* space. The *en* space is usually represented by the veranda (*en-gawa*) extending outwards under the overhanging roofs with translucent paper screen (*shoji*) on the inner side. See "Oku – Depth, Invisible Center" the fourth chapter of this work.



further development. The Azuma Residence (Sumiyoshi house)...was already the ultimate statement of the closed type” (Watanabe, 1982, p.53).

Within this second spatial layer around the building periphery, the third is developed, consisting of the two closed blocks and an open terrace joining the two (Figure 6.16). The composition of this forms a U-shaped layer that embraces a water court at the center, a due expression of Ando’s “internalization of the exterior.” The formation of the centripetal layout is completed.

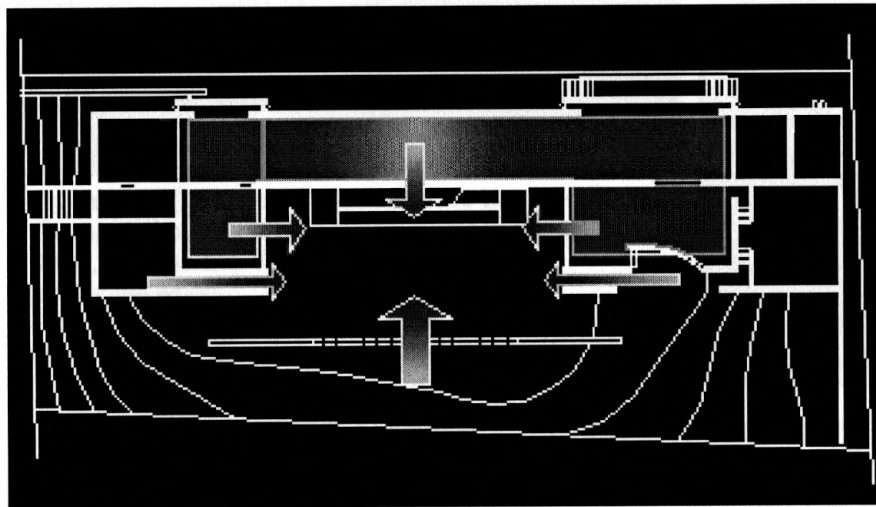


Figure 6.16 The third spatial layer of the centripetal formation. This layer maintains an absolutely closed boundary on the Eastern side, while remaining open towards the central court. All the spatial forces are collected at the central court, the reference for the whole spatial configuration.

Sitting at the heart of the centripetal spatial layers, this inner court constitutes a fixed point, which man and architecture orients and gives reference to. As the court unfolds outward to the landscape, the water surface marks the reflection of the trees and sky and catches the breezes in the ripples. In these connections, the central court gathers the forces of the natural world and domesticates them within the dwelling (Figure 6.1 & 6.17). Through this reversal of interior and exterior, Ando intends to build a minimum existential world, a context of new totality among nature, man, and architecture, which has been fragmented in modern urbanization. And for Ando, such an effort stems as

much from the traditional notion of *oku* as the original point of existence as from his attempt at the reconstruction of the city on a different scale, to fix the city through the defining of the “center.”

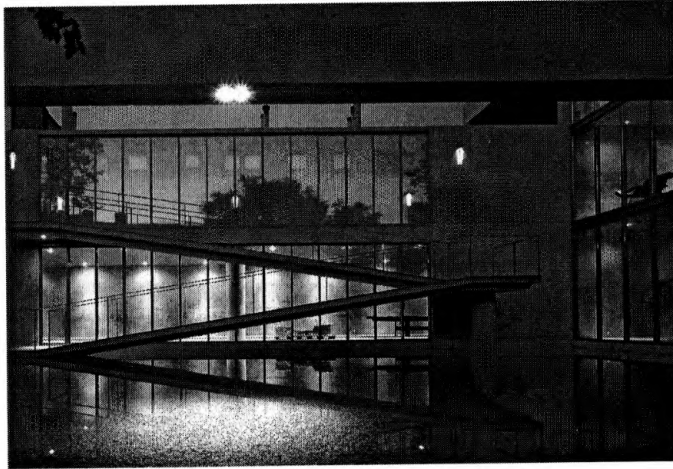
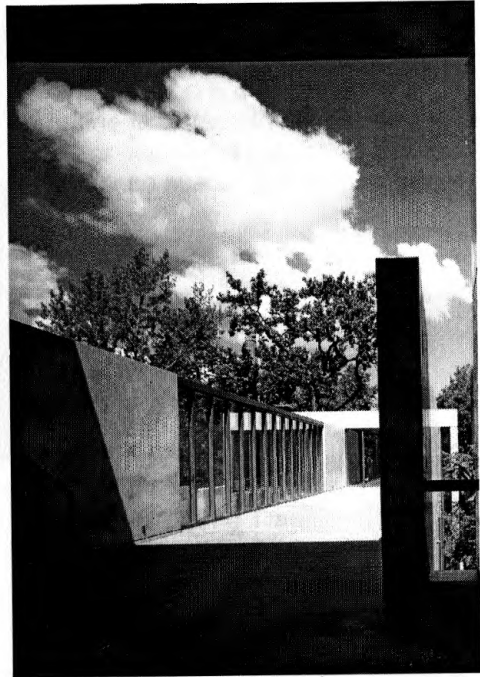


Figure 6.17 (Left) central space of the Lee House. The spatial syntax is composed by the terrace, ramp, and the two closed blocks, a minimum existential world.

Figure 6.18 (Right) The open terrace as a space for outdoor activities and the focus of the central space.



To re-present the harmonious confrontation between man and nature, Ando has split the focus of the central space between the aquatic court and the terrace. Since the court of water is after all an unattainable zone, the terrace becomes a central activity space.<sup>89</sup> For this, Ando has developed this connection between the blocks into a “stage” and hence endows it with a predominant significance (Figure 6.18), whereas in his early works, a similar element is most often minimized as a bridge (Sumiyoshi house) or a tunnel-like hallway (Horiuchi House). And yet even here, the significance of the stage is found rather in relation to the twin blocks, ramp, and open court. Such a spatial combination of

<sup>89</sup> Ando writes on his creative intent for this open terrace: “The second level terrace, open to sky, forms the center of social activities for this residence, and is used for parties and other such events.” Tadao Ando, “Tadao Ando: Eychaner/Lee House,” *Architecture and Urbanism* (November, 1998), p.118.

water court and bridge-like stage has already appeared in his Theater on Water (Figure 6.19). In both cases, the spatial syntax of this kind alludes to the traditional Kabuki Theater (Figure 6.20).

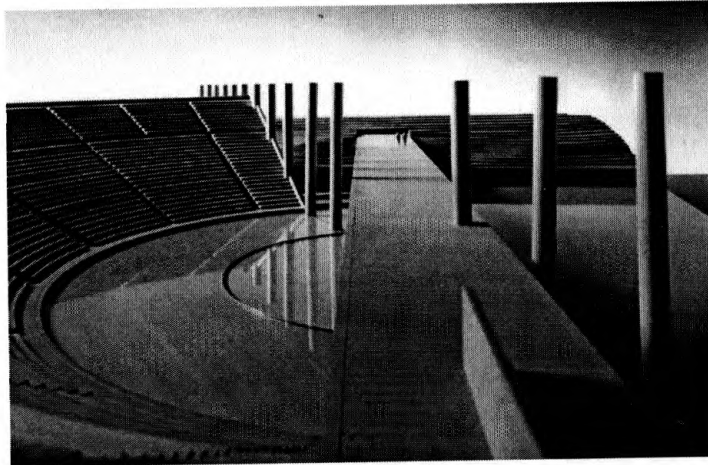


Figure 6.19 Theatre on the Water, Hokkaido, 1987. The spatial configuration is constituted by a bridge-like stage traversing through a water court, and flanked by the audience seats.



Figure 6.20 The Traditional Japanese Kabuki Theatre, depicted in a 1794 print. The stage is flanked by two closed blocks of audience seats, while opening to the audience on the front. The bridge-like passage for actor's transverses through the audience.

By referring to the idea of stage, Ando intends to create a space of presence, or a public space for “seeing” people and “being seen” by people, so as to promote the contact between man and nature, man and man (Figure 6.1). In this sense, the central court effects a meeting in urban space, wherein the stage becomes an urban “square” of encounter and participation, and the ramp is a “street” enabling man to move freely both horizontally and vertically, just as in a



Figure 6.21 View from the tower towards the stage. The tower provides a place of “seeing” all the events occurring in the public space as one looks out through the glazed openings on the stage or on nature

pre-modern town, a narrow street will turn, ascend or descend, and eventually debouch into a square. Standing on the stage, one is exposed to the immense sky and the broad expanse of water, while being in the “city.” And at the same time, the stage is a place where family parties and other social activities are held, and where one identifies oneself as part of the society and environment. The two closed blocks, on the other hand, become freestanding “buildings” of the city, the private domain of the individual. Meanwhile, it provides a place of “seeing” all the events occurring in the public space as one looks out through the glazed openings on the stage or on nature, yet not compromising their privacy (Figure 6.21). Within such a context that Ando has deliberately created in the city, nature, man, and architecture exist in a tense, but ideal balance. Ando writes:

Ever since I started, I have tried to...create public spaces that will encourage dialogue. This might be an individual’s dialogue between himself, nature, and time – or it might be a dialogue between people. I can’t dictate how people will use these spaces, but I want them to be aware of the possibilities of dialogue. Space cannot dictate to people, but it can guide people (1996, p.24).

Based on the discussion above, it is essential to claim that for Ando, meanings of substantial existence stem from a sense of identification between



man and world, dwelling and building, as something implied by both Western and Eastern philosophy. It follows that, for him, to build is to construct the relationship with man and things, through which we find our existential foothold in the world. Yet as contemporary civilization has been embroiled into the ever-escalating consumerism, spiritual poverty results when too much effort has been placed on material abundance. And as nature has been subjugated in the process of industrialization and urbanization, it leaves contemporary man a barren land of urban morass, begetting the trivialization of human existence. It is in this respect that Ando has assumed a culturally oppositional stance towards building. When contemporary city no longer provides the kind of space that spares and preserves human existence, Ando invests the domestic realm to regain our humanity and to recover the sacred attribute within the secular domain. This notion finds a parallel in the opposition between culture and civilization. And in the process, Ando has consciously manipulated the traditional concept of *ma* as a protective periphery to move away from city, and *oku* to reconstruct the original point of land.

Of course, most of Ando's buildings are rooted in his homeland and offer a challenge at its most subversive Japanese context. Yet as contemporary civilization has been increasingly escalated into the phenomenon of universalization, Ando's proposition, be it physical or metaphysical, assumes not only an autochthonous critique, but also a cross-cultural criticism that tends to recover the generic devaluations which architecture has suffered in the process of civilization, as explicitly in the Lee house. In other words, Ando aspires to a



pre-modern sense of human existence wedged in modern circumstance, and roots his methodology in both the universal and the particular, underlying our concepts of time and space. Thus, in the Eychaner/Lee House in Chicago, Ando is by no means exporting a formal language from his Japanese archetypes; neither is he dealing with a totally different issue. His luggage contains only his sensibilities towards that dwelling domain to which every human being in the world belongs. Where much the same elements and centripetal configuration recur in the Lee house as those of his early Japanese works, we should not justify them as merely linguistic translocations, but rather recognize the equal validity of their experiential qualities for the West as for the East. With regard on this, Ando has written (1989c, p.35):

I have often ask myself why Westerners should show interest in my work...In all likelihood, the Western perception of the problem it is facing, and my own perception, have something in common. Perhaps my works provides some stimulus to those who are searching for possible new relationships among human beings, civilization, culture, and nature.

## Nature and Geometry

As elaborated above, the basic scheme of the “internalization of the exterior” features Ando’s method in the articulating of “territory.” In the following, I would like these two concepts to converge in the discussion and extend them to the notion of “void,” in the traditional concept of *ma*.

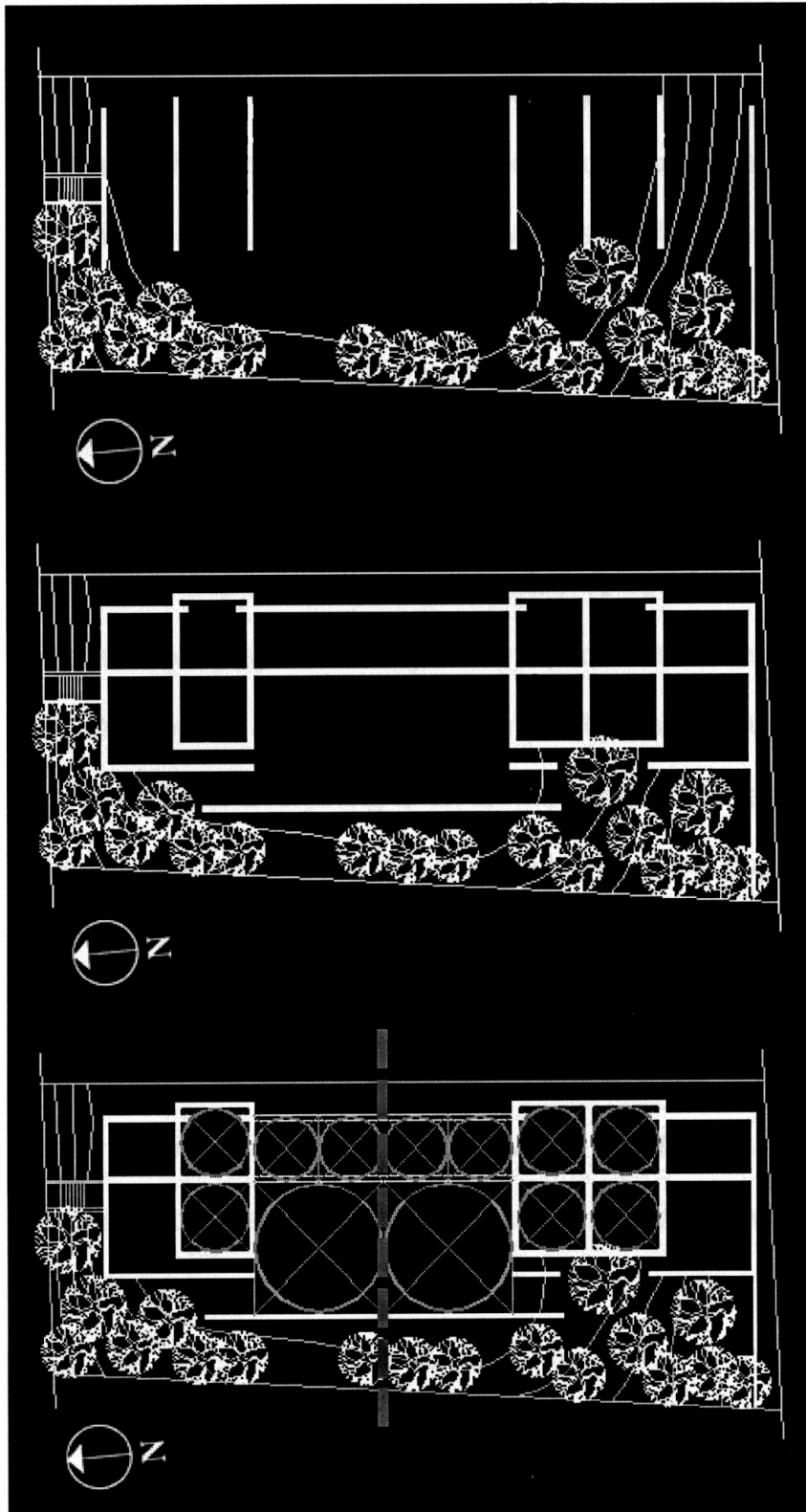
To the struggle of abstracting nature, Ando has brought two important design interventions, physically as well as metaphysically. The first is the idea of “gap,” best represented in the Church of the Light. The second, more significant aspect is the idea of “void,” or “empty space.” In the Lee house, the “internalization of the exterior” is essentially an effort of creating such “voids,” which are rendered perceivable through the shapeless and irreducible nature in the form of light, shadow, rain, and the “framed sky,” and which, when assimilated into daily life events, exhibits an evocative and provocative power appealing to the substantial meanings of existence. The “substantial void” of this kind is deeply rooted in the traditional sense of *ma*, wherein the ineffable presence of emptiness is sensed through the spirit of elusive natural events and phenomena and gives the sense of real existence. This intimacy of nature and space implicitly in the sense of *ma* has an immense effect on the traditional concept of “territory,” which denotes not merely the “dwelling structure,” but something closer to the “dwelling territory,” in which the peripheral area of nature and landscape is conceived to be part of the dwelling. Ando writes: “It is the traditional spatial organization that keeps the garden and the interior space as a unit that I seek to carry on my architecture” (Ando, 1989d, pp.36-37). Thereby for

Ando, “territory” means the “architecturalized site,” wherein interior and exterior, architecture and landscape are not separately entities, but come forth as the nexus of relationships. Just as the “void” signifies the idea of traditional garden, his insertion of ubiquitous “voids” in the building is a due expression of the cognition of “architecture as an all-embracing site,” in the traditional meaning of “house-territory”.<sup>90</sup>

To architecturalize the territory is to lay bare the individual spirit of site; this requires that order must be imposed. In this process, Ando’s habitual reliance on geometry is particularly in evidence. It is the interstitial voids generated between walls, and strictly controlled by geometry that establish the presence of the Lee house. The inherent logic of the site is apparent in its natural formation. Several large poplars are planted along the western part of the site and particularly densely distributed on the northern and southern ends, thus producing a natural boundary and leaving in any case an expanse of land at the heart of the site. Responding to this situation, the first array of walls spreads upon the ground on the southern part of the site, proclaiming the evolution of architecture herein while preserving the trees in their original presence (Figure 6.22 A). A sequence of “voids” generated between walls confront face-to-face the landscape, with the central one remaining relatively spacious so as to save the topographic nature of land. A second layer of walls vertical to the first is then

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<sup>90</sup> These terms are used by Koji Taki when he elaborates the meaning of “territory” of Ando’s architecture in connection to Japanese cultural tradition. See Koji Taki, “Minimalism or Monotonicity? A Contextual Analysis of Tadao Ando’s Method,” in Tadao Ando. *Tadao Ando: Buildings, Projects, Writings* (New York: Rizzoli, 1984), p.15.



D. "Voids" generated by geometric walls in relation to the logic of the site.

E. A matrix of "voids", and walls architecturalize the site and introduce order.

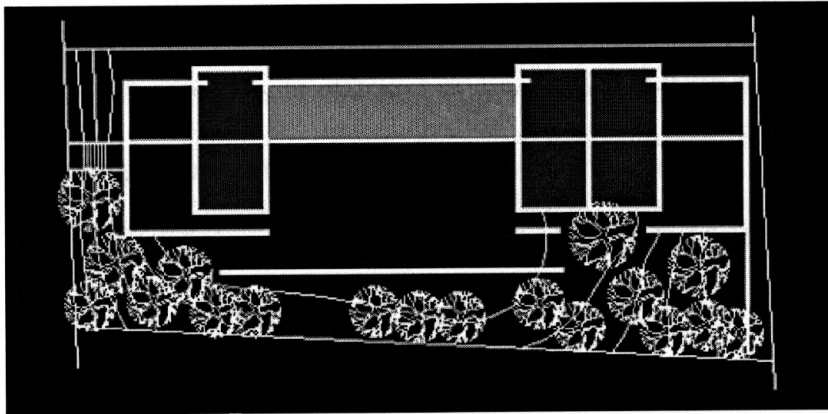
F. The geometric composition of an orthogonal coordinate system.

Figure 6.22  
architecturalization of site  
by voids, Walls and  
geometry.

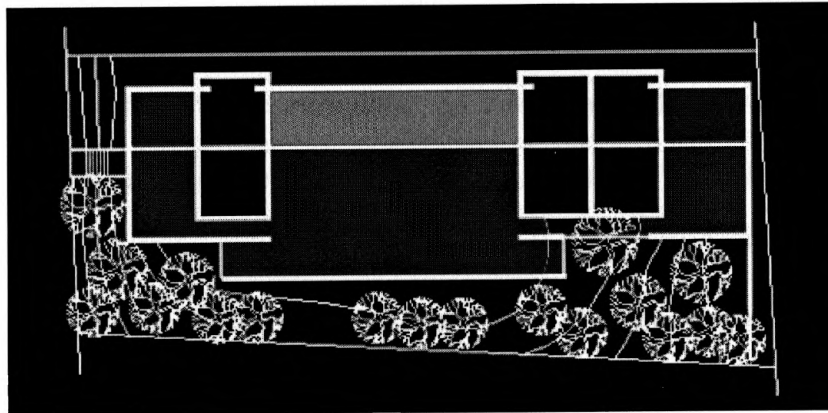
superimposed, and the spatial result is a matrix of voids, from which a geometrical order is evidently at work (Figure 6.22 B). First, the whole structure centers on the two closed voids made up of cosmic cubes. The one on the north contains four 247.5ft cubes, two on each level. This is doubled on the south side, which is a large cube consisting of eight small cubes of the same size. While these two voids are strictly organized by square, the other ones are seen as simple division, multiplication, or transformation of squares. Moreover, the two closed voids are oriented at right angles to the main axis running from east to west across the central void; secondary voids to the north and south are also arranged nearly symmetrically with respect to the axis. All spatial elements are thus reduced to a simple, regular model of an orthogonal coordinate system (Figure 6.22 C). Everything is on an inorganic plane, except for the cubic that is eaten away in one spot by a curved wall to keep the poplar in its original location.

Before the generation of spaces, the matrix of voids is articulated through an *a priori* geometrical scheme that introduces order into the site. In their precision and rigidity, geometrical walls and voids set a “place” apart from the randomness of surrounding landscape, and prepare the ground for the articulation of space. Tension is sustained between natural and built elements. Through the instrumentality of this geometrical matrix, Ando is able to exploit the voids and differentiate them for either functional or rhetorical purposes. On his customary approach, Ando has allocated the basic functions within the geometrical order, turning the cubic volumes into domestic rooms (Figure 6.23 A). This is at a utilitarian level, yet the significance of this work lies in his poetic





The Functional Zones allocated within the Cubic volumes.



Interstitial Voids generated between and beyond functional zones.

Figure 6.23 Figure and background relationship between function and void.

rendering of the “substantial voids,” or *ma*, which Ando has opened between and beyond functional zones to accommodate the atypical aspects of natural events and life activities (Figure 6.23 B). In so doing, these “voids” are sublimated into symbolic spaces that are understood and perceived in the sense of *ma*. As a result of this transformation, the spatial configuration unfolds in the north-south direction a “void/solid/void/solid/void” order, in a sense linked to the idea of “nature/house/nature/house/nature,” and in the east-west direction the central void is subdivided in the order of “stage-water-frame.” By virtue of these “voids,” nature and site are architecturalized to lose their naturalized appearance, ready for human participation; while at the same time, the architecture is turned into a highly structured matrix of indefinite spaces, which are not merely the production

of function or geometrical composition, but are images of a metaphysical order. In the following, I will elaborate upon these “voids” in terms of Ando’s “abstracted nature” and bring forth their substantial meanings.

The dialogue with nature is first revealed in the forecourt of entry (Figure 6.24). To put an empty court before the entrance is to disconnect the house with its immediately urban surroundings. This empty court is for Ando a restorative interstice wherein individuals may retreat from the turmoil of city and regain the sense of domestic tranquility, as they are made to transverse spaces of monastic bareness in order to enter the house. Ando’s deliberate insertion of this “void pause” originates from two interrelated sources. The first is rooted in a deeper consciousness of the traditional sense of *ma* implying the “discontinuity within continuity.” The second, more direct association is the traditional concept of dwelling territory as the oneness of house and garden, wherein the garden appears on the margin of the nature as macrocosm and at the limit of the house as microcosm, establishing a discontinuous continuity between the two.

Ando, however, makes no attempt at an iconological translation of traditional garden but a topological one, which is seen in the way that he has pursued the theme of material and nature so that the idea of traditional garden and the essence of nature are fully expressed in the abstracted courtyard space. Here, an inorganic empty area is paved with bare concrete and is differentiated from the urban desert outside as well as the wooden floor of house interior. Just as the court speaks of the idea of garden, this concrete ground is for Ando a



Figure 6.24 The forecourt of entry at Lee House. The “substantial void” of pure material and geometry signifies the essential nature in forms such as light and shadows.



Figure 6.25 Dry landscape garden in Ryoanji Temple, Kyoto. *Ma* as a metaphysical order manipulated by Traditional Buddhists to sense the “Void” or “Emptiness”.

rhetorical representation of earth. In this respect, Ando writes (1980, p.44):

My image of the concrete floor derives from the pounded-earth floors of traditional Japanese dwellings and townhouse, which always inspire a lively awareness of all the living that takes place in the spaces. This is an origin point for my space for living and finds representation in my works in the form of unfinished concrete. I am certain that this is a valid approach.

When much the same gesture is repeated in the Lee house, Ando’s stance is to create a geometrical “second earth,” and to remind one of the abundant earth upon which we set our existential foothold, despite the transformation of its surface into an ephemeral urban morass in modern times.

Not only the ground, each surface of the courtyard is on a geometrical plane made of exposed concrete. These concrete surfaces are sensual and

moody, gloomy in the rain and glistening in the sun, transforming the intangible void into a living, organic substance by which one perceives the motion of the sun, the moon, the earth, and meteorological changes of the world. In the mediating of geometry and material, Ando intends to reduce space to its bare essentials and in so doing to converge architectural meaning to “zero degree,” which, after being stripped of all the unnecessary, is able to endow man with possibilities of creating new meanings and thus new aspects to his existence. Ando writes: “I want to charge architecture with sense of life and a feeling of substantial existence by creating simple geometric forms with materials as limited as possible at present” (Ando, 1977b, p.44). Such an effort of creating “substantial voids” approaches the sense of *ma* or emptiness. In line with the tradition concept, the emptiness for Ando is a metaphysical icon, a paradigm of richness wherein one experiences not the ordinary joy of seeing a tree in a conventional garden but an innermost feeling, the sense that one is encountering an eternal nature to which everything relates and is absolutely life-affirming. With regard to its physical nature as well as the underlying metaphysical order, this empty court reveals both a superficial and deep reference to the traditional dry landscape garden in Ryoanji, wherein *ma* is adopted by Japanese Buddhists to express the notion of emptiness (Figure 6.25).

Much the same “discontinuous continuity,” or simply *ma*, is repeated in the central space of the Lee house, wherein two closed blocks serving domestic purposes are disconnected by the outdoor terrace and water court in between (Figure 6.26). One enters the house and expects security, but such a common

sense is immediately betrayed by an open court beyond that space. To enclose an outdoor space inside a building is to reverse space and to make space discontinuous. By the tenets of modern architecture, this design gesture is quite inconvenient and irrational. Yet as long as Ando is concerned with the creating of substantial void, such a move is both essential and logical. Frampton remarks:

For Ando this discontinuity within continuity is seen as an essential attribute of the elusive concept of *Ma*, which not only signifies place but also the idea of the consummation of space through the action of a body from one point to another (Frampton, 1991, p.14).

In addition, this discontinuity assimilates nature into the house so that people here are granted a space of presence wherein they could commune with nature directly and are almost obliged to harmonize their daily life with the severity of local climate, as they pass from one room to another through the unsheltered stage at the center. Again, the emptiness of space is charged with the fullness of substantial existence, in the meaning of dwelling for Ando, which is not about the bourgeois comfort or ideal convenience, but as the evidence of a corporeal, sentient being alive in the world. This dual nature of existence, void and substantial, domestic and symbolic, is formulated by Ando: "I believe that architecture must have double meaning – that is, it must be a daily-life space inevitable in the light of the functions it must house while being simultaneously a symbolic space" (Ando, 1977b, p.44). In other words, the life-nature-spiritual order of the Lee house is realized in the insertion of this central void.



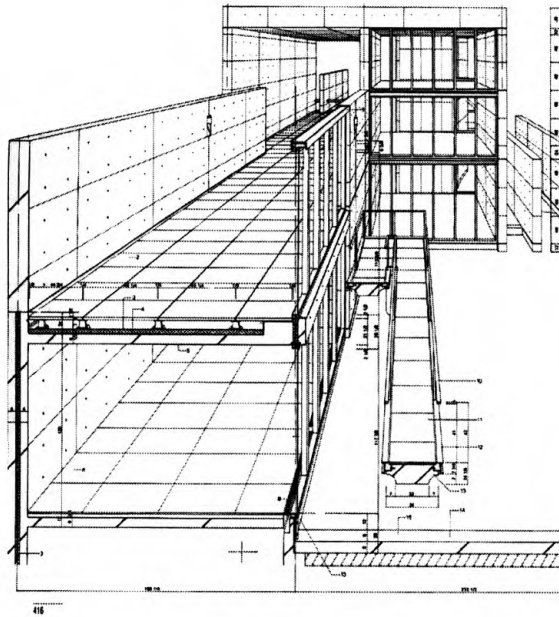


Figure 6.26 Axonometric of the central space of the Lee house. The two closed blocks are disconnected by an open stage and courtyard in between.



Figure 6.27 The central courtyard of the Lee House. An unattainable “void” created and perceived in the sense of *ma*, defying the notion of “center”.

Beyond the central stage, an expanse of water fills the central courtyard, and eventually debouches into the landscape outside (Figure 6.27). The water court is seen as both an architecturalized nature and a naturalized architecture as it literally blurs the edge between building and landscape. Ironically, while Ando has strived so hard to create a patch of earth at the forecourt, he did opposite here at the central court, flooding the earth with flowing water. Deliberately creating an aquatic environment where land is most abundant and central activities could be physically gathered is certainly not a rational or functional solution. By this disconnection, Ando defies the notion of an absolute “center,” and replaces it with the perception of an empty subject, in the elusive

concept *ma*. The space of the water court is neither accessible nor habitable; it is merely a “void,” physically isolated from the rest of the house. In this respect, it goes against the function of “center,” which is meant to be occupied by people and integrated into the normal life activities. In contrast to the western idea of “center”, which is characterized by the presence of material forms, being visually dramatic and focused, the mirror-like surface of water and the glazed facades enclosing the central space attempt to dematerialize anything substantial, transform things into bare vision, and subject them to infinite reflections, without a center to grasp, a primary core of images. And against the verticality, heaven-direction of “center,” the water surface emphasizes the horizontal plane on earth, which reflects the highest on the lowest, and by which one perceives the motion of rain and air, the changing countenance of sky. It is a form of “land art” shaped by Ando’s hands.

Therefore, instead of asserting the absoluteness of “center,” the central space is no more than an indefinite void; instead of presenting the fullness of “center,” it rather signifies the absence of something, the lack of physicality. The spatial organization of the house is formulated by multilayered walls and spaces so as to envelop the precious something inside, whereas their “center” is no more than an vaporized notion, existing here, not in order to assert its authority, but to sustain the entire existence domain with an empty substance. Botond Bogнар writes: “The essence of Ando’s work is a paradox insofar as they are designed with the purpose of creating substantial voids that can reject every absolute, including the notion of the center” (Bognar, 190, p.22). Again, the

space of this kind is only understood in the sense of *ma*, which is seen as a provider of a shapeless, formless realm wherein elusive events and various phenomena of nature take place, which when directly exposed to the realm of dwelling, are capable of continuously animating the sense of human beings.

Still beyond the water pond, a fragment of wall stands outside the western boundary, thus creating a discontinuous continuity on the architectural enclosure. As stated before, the Japanese sense of *ma* has always been associated with the post, but never with the wall. Standing alone without load-bearing requirement of structural or functional purpose, this autonomous wall deliberately adopted by Ando is seen as a rhetorical counterpart of the traditional post:

A single post in a scene has the effect of interrupting the scene. Similarly a single wall, serves, interrupts, opposes, and violently alters the scene in which it is placed; it already shows signs of evolution into architecture. At the same time, the wall can blend with the setting through such things as the shadow cast on its surface by the leaves of nearby trees" (1978, p.12).

If in the Church of the Light, the pristine purity of his concrete wall rendered its chaotic surroundings more vivid, then the same intention can be seen here as Ando places this wall and landscape in a similar mutual interrogation. The wall reaches out into nature, which is simultaneously emphasized and challenged by its geometrical logic and inner strength. Its empty surface is constantly rendered by the movement of the sun, yet obliges nature to cast perfect geometric shadows (Figure 6.29). It is in this encounter of the unchanging architectural datum with natural events that Ando's freestanding wall alludes to the traditional sense of *ma*.

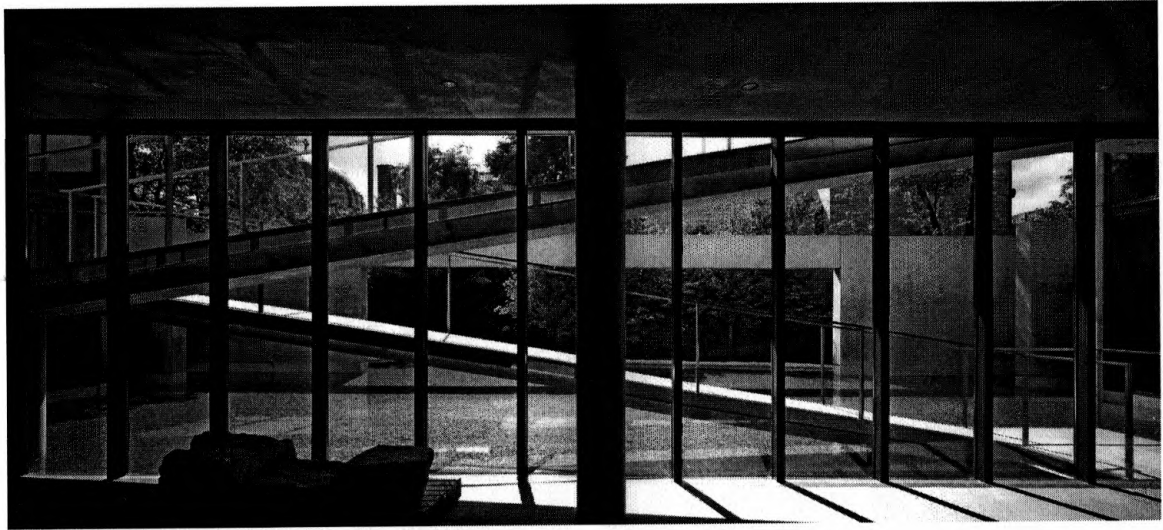


Figure 6.28 View towards the water court and landscape. The freestanding wall acts as a picture frame parceling off a fragment of distant scene, while at the same time increases the horizontal depth of space, suggesting the existence of *oku*.

And yet even here, the significance of this wall is more related to its larger spatial context than to its individuality, and its essential role is to act as a spatial layer that gives depth to space and evokes the sense of *oku*. By placing this wall in the midst of landscape, Ando intends to reinforce the perception of a horizontal distance between the subject and object. When observed from the viewpoints of residents, the wall serves as a projected frame that parcels off a fragment of nature and pulls it inside. Yet at the same time, this gesture directs one visually or mentally beyond the central space and the frame itself to an indefinite remote place, suggesting some mystical quality of an all unseen, larger space within the landscape (Figure 6.28). As a result of Ando's skillful handling of each spatial element and their sequence of stage-court-frame-landscape, the central space exhibits its significance in a horizontal, unattainable depth, enabling one to perceive the somewhat uncertain existence of *oku*. It is in this respect that the essential quality of the central space and Ando's creative intent is understood.





Figure 6.29 Freestanding wall as a projected frame in landscape. Manipulation of water and frame, landscape and *oku* alludes to the traditional torii gate

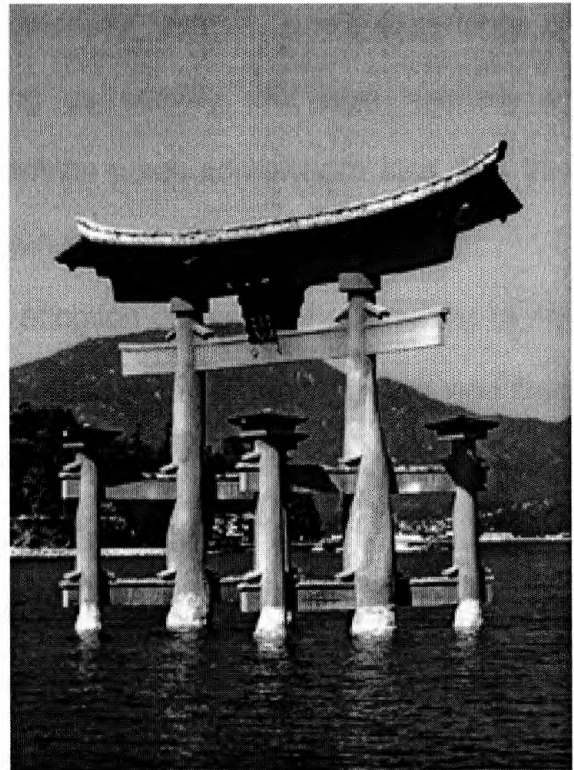


Figure 6.30 The torii at the Itsukushima Shrine. This is the most impressive example of the projection of frame in nature, which simultaneously emphasizes the *oku* recessed in the depth of landscape.

Here, Ando's manipulation of water and frame, landscape and *oku* has an origin in the Shinto form, *torii*. The *torii* in the bay at the Itsukushima shrine is a most impressive example of the projection of a frame in nature, which simultaneously emphasizes the *oku* recessed deeper in the remote mountain (Figure 6.30).

While the building has no real "center," it represents the sense of *ma* and incorporates multilayered walls and spatial creases that create a feeling of invisible depth and imply the mystical *oku* beyond inviting discovery. Ironically, after one penetrates through layers and layers of walls and spaces intending to discover this precious wrapped something, unexpectedly the mystical quality together with the *oku* escapes and appears empty. After one arrives in the



innermost part of the building, Ando intentionally reverses one's experience of inside not only by physically positioning us outside, but also mentally or symbolically directing us to a remote, indefinite place somewhere else. It is this experiential aspect of space that defies the notion of an absolute "center."

Paralleling the idea of *oku*, Ando's adoption of the traditional sense of *ma* is embodied in his deliberate insertion of "void" by way of layered walls and their interstices. The "void" of this kind allows nature into the dwelling, and symbolizes new relationships between human beings and things when direct contact between them is mediated by building materials. By virtue of these "voids," both nature and architecture are transformed, losing their superficial identity and allowing substantial meanings for human existence. On the other hand, when such relationships are sustained by the voids, they alter the architecture in complex ways that are disconnected with rigid composition of geometry and limited use of material and create the sensation of uncertainty that betrays our common experience of space. Ando writes (1991b, p.13):

I feel that the greater the complexity of an apparently simple spatial arrangement, the more effective and interesting it becomes. The greater the divergence between the space as experienced and the rigorous geometry of the architecture, the more interesting the work is to people. I want to create, through the drama of betrayal, unforgettable spatial experiences that affect, in a profound way, the human spirit.

## Materiality and Immateriality

In spatial terms, the traditional sense of *ma* is consciously reinterpreted by Ando as “substantial void”; a complementary, yet equal essential attribute of *ma* may be formulated as “immaterial substance,” in terms of fixed forms. Both aspects stem from the immutable source lying at the base of Japanese cultural tradition. That is, the indivisibility of man and nature, with architecture as an intermediary. Isozaki directly points to this connection when he writes of *Ma*: “The fondness for movement of (nature) permeates the Japanese concept of indefinite architectural space in which a layer of flat boards, so thin as to be practically transparent, determines permeation of light and lines of vision” (Isozaki, 1979, p.78). In *sukiya* house, wall does not actually exist; instead the delicate wooden-frame filled by large panels of shoji effectively dematerializes the building at the periphery. The architectural forms thus made exhibit an attribute so devoid of actuality and materiality that the forms approach the sense of “*ma*” or “emptiness.”

Yet such an ideal approach has been removed from the modern reality. Just as nature has been changed in the process of modern urbanization, so has the relationship between man and nature, house and context. In the harsh metropolitan environment of the Lee house, Ando has internalized nature, which would in an earlier age have been encountered at the periphery. Against the dematerialized boundary of *sukiya*, he delineates the territory of the Lee house with rigid walls of concrete. Ando’s effort, in summary, is essentially the “reversal of interior and exterior,” which endows the Lee house with “twin facades” on the

exterior as on the interior. The due expression of this gesture is the contradictory material condition articulated with respect to each side.

Around the periphery of the house, there is the “outer facade,” which is seen as “inside” the city, and which Ando regards as a protective shield for a restorative domain of dwelling. An exposed concrete facade is thus presented to defend the perpetual siege of the urban turmoil (Figure 6.15). And the materiality exhibited is that of solidity, density, and thickness. Meanwhile, Ando insists on the articulation of authentic materiality so as to oppose the superficial and ephemeral formality of commercial architecture, which has resulted in a loss of substance in contemporary city. Around the center of the house, there is the “inner facade,” which after being removed “outside” the city, is to delineate a delicate interface through which the dweller is presented to an eternal nature Ando has introduced inside the house. The very role of this facade enables Ando to dematerialize it, replace the concrete substance with a material of transparent, and ethereal quality, and in so doing, reconnects man and nature. It is on this “inner facade” that we are able to appreciate the deep *sukiya* reference, and the traditional sense of *ma*.

In the Lee house, the courtyard elevations of the two blocks are almost entirely glazed, with the concrete substance being minimized to a marginal area. Viewing frontally, the facade appears no less than as a concrete picture frame subdivided internally by orthogonal gray metal sections, effecting a delicate skeleton reminiscent of the wooden structure in the traditional *sukiya* house (Figure 6.31 and 6.32). The luminous sheen of the glazing surfaces strongly



Figure 6.31 The “inner facade” of the Lee House. The Combination of glazing panel and delicate metal section dematerializes the building, achieving the spatial continuum.



Figure 6.32 *Ma* reflected in the *sukiya* house. Large panels of light material and wooden structure realize a space of emptiness. The Shoi-ken at Katsura Villa.

contradicts the mass of concrete on adjacent elevations, producing an indefinite, almost invisible boundary around the water court. While the cave-like openings on the outer facade tends to give emphasis to enclosure and territoriality, the filling in of a skeletal wall by large surface of glazing dematerializes the building on its inside face. As a result, exterior and interior are not intended to be in contrast or in juxtaposition as distinctive worlds as on the periphery of the house but form a space-continuum wherein the physical space inside always lives in the organic metamorphosis of nature outside and becomes a realm of emptiness.

The sense of immateriality is further enhanced by the pictorial effect of the central structure. On the courtyard facade, Ando has nearly flushed the glazing with the concrete edge, although such detailing may cause undesirable environmental problems with sun and rain. This powerful detailing gives the

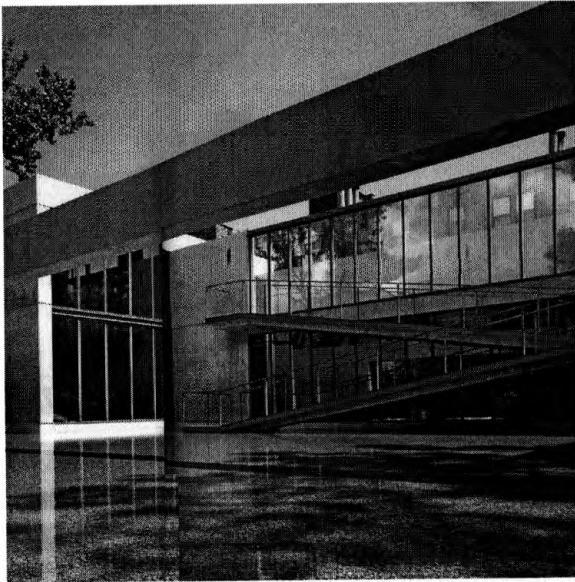


Figure 6.33 The facade of the central space. The facade is created as the juxtaposition of various planes that helps to effects a two-dimensional, pictorial space.

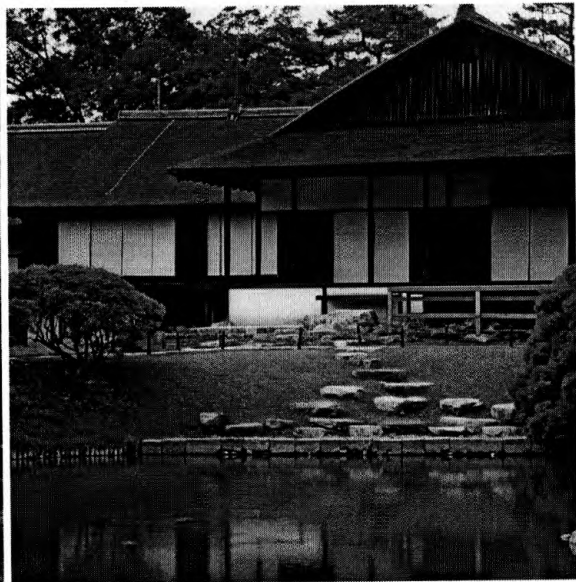


Figure 6.34 Facade of traditional *sukiya* house. Different planes are juxtaposed, giving an impression of discontinuous continuity. The main house of Katsura.

impression that the building has been cut at that point, and acts to realize a homogeneous surface. Much the same impact is achieved in the way that each material, concrete or glass, is used not fragmentally but full-size. In these attempts, Ando intends to treat each surface as an extended, autonomous plane, each consisting of single material and exhibiting a homogeneous yet distinctive quality. The central space of the Lee house is thus created and perceived as primarily the juxtaposition of various planes, which work together to constitute a facade of discontinuous continuity that helps to transform the volumetric, physical space into planar, pictorial space, like that of the *Sukiya* (Figure 6.33 and 6.34). This reduction of material, three-dimension space to immaterial, two-dimensional space is seen as an inherent attribute of the ideogram *ma*, which denotes interval in both space and time, indirectly referring to the two-dimensional or frontal quality of space. And Ando's approach here recalls the old space-making method,



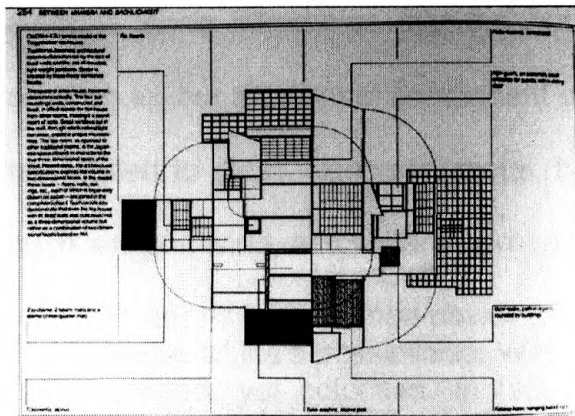


FIG. 16. Paper model (akusaku) east of Teigokusan teahouse, Shinjō-an, Daitokuji, Kyoto (mid-17th century).

Figure 6.35 The traditional method of spacing making. (Left) all of the surfaces of the teahouse space are analyzed as floor plans and folded together to form space. (Right) the interior of teahouse showing the juxtaposition of distinctive planes thus created.



in which the juxtaposition of distinctive planes gives rise to the perception of space (Figure 6.35), as Isozaki writes: “all of the surfaces of the space are analyzed as if they were floor plans. The theory is that the person examining them will mentally raise the drawings or the walls to their position in the completed rooms and in this way imagine the way the space will look” (Bognar, 1985, p.61). Since visual reality remains in the realm of two-dimensionality, space transcends the usual material, sculptural character, and defies objectification along perspective rules. Rather, space is only signified in the sense of *ma*, or “emptiness,” as something perceived identical with intangible qualities and the spirit of elusive events, much as these elements even create and determine the space itself.

Upon these two design interventions, Ando adds a third, resorting to natural force in modulating the character of physical forms in the Lee house. The central court is covered with a sheet of water, which constitutes a horizontal facade that is an integral part of the whole spatial syntax. Water is a natural

element Ando introduced into the house. However, nature for him is not an addition to, but a principal component of space. For Ando, building materials are not limited to glass, concrete, metal, but go ahead to include immaterial forms such as light, wind, and water to evoke the emptiness of space. Ando writes:

Water has the strange power to stimulate the imagination and to make use aware of life's possibilities. Water is a monochromatic material, seemingly colored, yet colorless. In fact, in that monochromatic world there are infinite shapes of color. Then, too, water is mirror. I believe there is a profound relationship between water and the human spirit (1991b, p.12).



Figure 6.36 The dematerialization by natural impact. Glass and concrete surface are naturalized through the additional texture of light and shadows reflected by water, their reality is distorted, enabling the sense of the emptiness of space, or *ma*.

Thereby water, a material of immateriality, a color of colorlessness, a surface of profound depth, provides a counterpoint of emptiness for material forms and physical space, and the paramount role of water here is to effect an immaterial presence of architecture. Ando has almost sunk the courtyard facade directly into

water, without providing any intermediary base for the building. The only transition between the glazed surface and the water below is articulated by a slender strip of concrete. This detailing emphasizes the aquatic nature of the building; while at the same time creates an illusory effect. Treated as a well-polished mirror, the water surface reflects the building, multiplies its forms, and extends them beyond the limit of the physical space. While the glazed surface creates a sense of transparency horizontally, connecting the interior with exterior, the water surface then conveys a feeling of openness and expanse to the space confined at the central court, delivering it vertically from the realm of reality into unreality. Light and shadows projected by the luminous water surface confront the unchanging datum of architecture and endow the material planes with an additional texture, initiating a superimposition of the organic and inorganic, material and immaterial (Figure 6.36). As a result, architectural forms are naturalized, assimilated into nature, and become “emptiness.” Yet such a scene is not meant as tableaux. With each increment of deflection in the motion of water current, all the surfaces by water are transformed into ephemeral events, flickering between the impression of materiality and immateriality. Like water, they are immutable, yet constantly changing; fluid and dynamic, yet static, giving a sense of impermanence within permanence. Their reality is distorted, and only the perpetual emptiness wherein all these changes and transformations take place informs the sense of substantial existence and evokes the sense of *ma*.

In addition to this case, Ando has explored the equal immaterial quality of space through the encounter of concrete with light, in the forecourt of the Lee

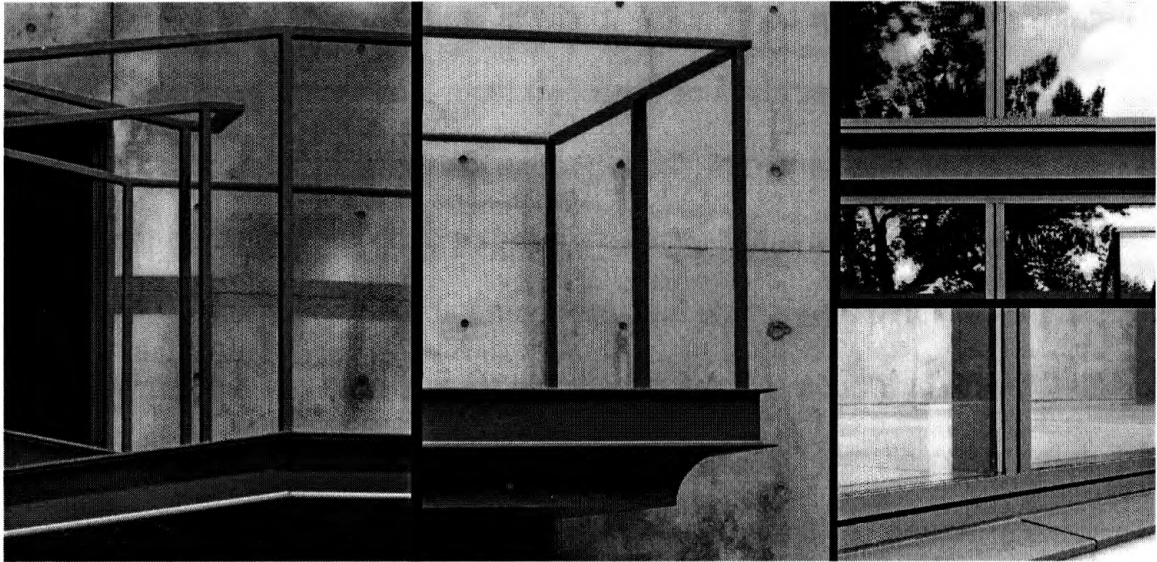


Figure 6.37 Material conditions of the Lee House. The very limited number of materials Ando used in the building, exposed concrete, glass, and steel

house as in the Church of the Light aforementioned. In all these cases, Ando pursues the same theme of the dematerialization of substantial forms under the action of nature in such a way to transform them into transient events. This effort originates in his ultimate theme of architecture, the creation of what he sees most real – that is, the essential emptiness of space in the traditional sense of *ma*. It is this ultimate base that his paradoxical attitude towards material forms stem. On the one hand, Ando works towards the concreteness and intrinsic quality of material in order to mediate the direct contact between nature and human beings. Yet on the other hand, the very intention also permits his dematerialization of forms under the impact of natural forces. Thereby we see material for him is merely an agent for the realization of space, or his rejection of pursuing materiality for its own sake.

The second feature of the material condition in the Lee house is the very limited number of materials Ando adopts (Figure 6.37). Besides concrete, glass,

and steel, the only other material is wood, which Ando has used for the interior floor (Figure 6.21), because it most frequently touches to human body and feels warm. This austere expression of corporeal forms also contributes to the immaterial quality of his architecture. For Ando, this austerity springs from two sources. On one hand, there is an oppositional stance to modern consumerism, in which material abundance and formal expression is sought at the expense of substantial meaning of architecture and human being. On the other hand, it is something inherited from tradition, as Koji Taki writes: "In Japan, meaning is produced not through abrupt changes but through subtle variations against a rather monotonous background. (Ando's work) can be seen as that quality of Japanese monotonicity which, through subtle change, can give rise to meaning" (Ando, 1984, p.22).



## Space, Time, and *Shintai*

For a fullest grasp Ando's creative intent in the Lee House, we must concern ourselves not only with the context of space, but also with a transitory, temporal context in which the feeling of time is an indispensable component of one's spatial experience, as something inherent and implicit in the traditional sense of *ma* denoting the one entity of space-time. In the Lee House, such a temporal context is produced by Ando's incorporating into his space making the motion of "*shintai*," a term referring to the "sentient being," in such a way as to render perceivable the sense of a temporal flux upon which the experience of space is structured. In his essay *Shintai and Body*, Ando writes: "Spatiality is the result not of a single, absolute vision, but of a multiplicity of directions of vision from a multiplicity of viewpoints made possible by the movement of *shintai*" (Ando, 1988, unpaginated). From this laconic passage, we are able to perceive more clearly perhaps than elsewhere, Ando's cognition of a mutable spatial reality and a non-linear, fluxing time that flows discontinuously at different rates and in different parts of space. Such an awareness of time is in strong contrast to the Western notion of a directional time, which is generally perceived as a linear succession of instants extending to an ultimate goal.<sup>91</sup>

In relation to space making, the distinctive time cognitions of the Eastern and Western worldviews are represented in the typological space and geometrical space of each culture. And with regard to the first, the fragmentary space of traditional *sukiya* serves as the best exemplar for such a Japanese

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<sup>91</sup> With regard to the time-cognition of Japanese cultural tradition (in contrast to that of the West), see "*Ma – Time, Interval, Flux*," the third chapter of this work.

space prototype. Ironically, however, while rooting his architecture in the traditional consciousness of space-time, Ando makes no attempt at an iconological translation of traditional space making. And the fact that the composition of the Lee house is strictly controlled by geometric order makes its spatial-temporal reality more complex, as a hidden reality that is to be interpreted and perceived through a significant reliance on one's experience rather on the building's appearance. Yet in order to bring to surface this latent discontinuity between its geometrical and experiential reality, it's necessary to examine first the spatial-temporal quality assumed by the geometrical composition.

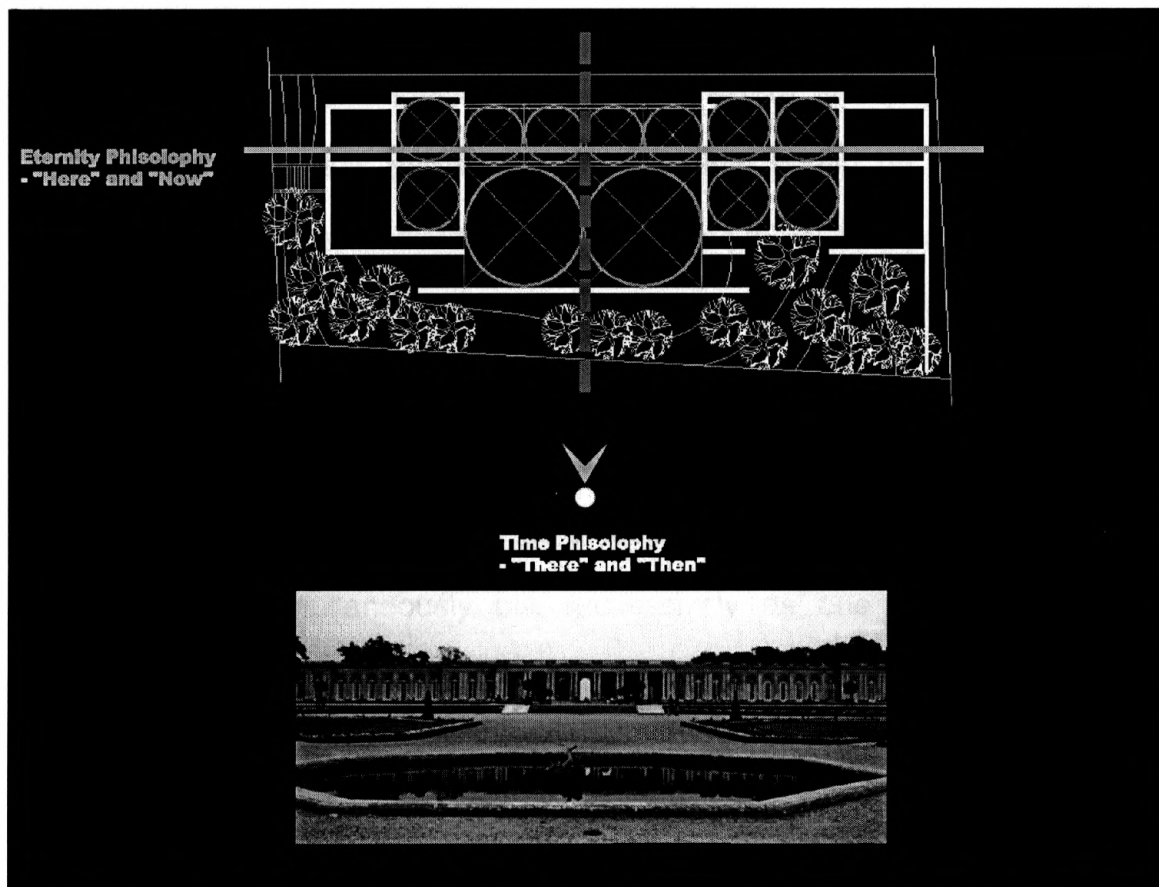


Figure 6.38 Space and time assumed by geometric composition. The diagram shows the distinct perception of space and time implied the line of geometric axis and the line of movement, resulting in the disconnection between the compositional and experiential reality of the building.

As shown in Figure 6.38, the geometric scheme centers on the prime central axis. Secondary elements, the courtyards and the cubic volumes, are quasi-symmetrically arranged on both sides, and are thereby never independent but subordinate to the main axis and ruled by the overall orthogonal system. As a result, assuming a perspective is constructed along the main axis, each compositional element and their relationships are grasped at one glance. The effect of such view is similar to the usual Western ones (Figure 6.38 below), wherein the perspective rationalizes the three-dimensional space and allows the sense of a directional time approaching and arrested at the distant prospect. In other words, the space and time suggested by the geometric perspective is “there” and “then,” an essential attribute of the Western “time philosophy.”<sup>92</sup>

Nevertheless, this perception of space-time based on geometrical and visual reality alone is immediately proved unreal as the human participation in the building takes place. The critical fact is that Ando has deliberately shifted the line of movement from the geometrical axis, and in so doing, disconnected one’s experience of space with its appearance so that the ideal geometrical space remains at a compositional level. As a result, the space of the Lee House is understood not simultaneously but successively as one approaches in an invisible depth of sequential spatial layers. The space and time thus perceived is shallow, with a focus always placed on “here-and-now” instead of “there-and-then.” It is this elusive sense of space-time as the ultimate reality of the building

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<sup>92</sup> See “*Ma* – Time, Interval, Flux,” the third chapter of this work. Also, Gunter Nitschke alludes to this and describes the “time philosophy” of the West and the “eternity philosophy” of the East: “It might be no accident that large countries tend to adopt ‘time philosophies’ such as those of the Judaeo-Christian belief. Time philosophies emphasise the there and then: movement is an aspect of time...Small dense countries in East Asia, such as Japan, Thailand and Vietnam have been attracted to ‘eternity philosophies,’ such as Buddhism. Eternity philosophies emphasise the here and now: rest is an aspect of space.”

that we seek to perceive in the following (the “map” of the visitor’s movement is presented in each figure below).

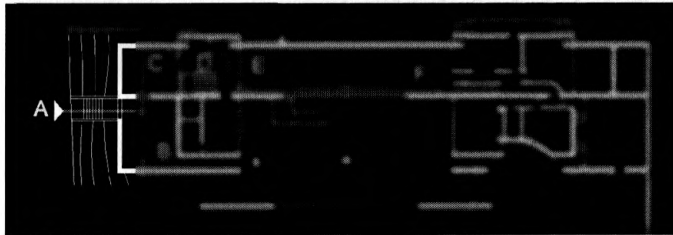
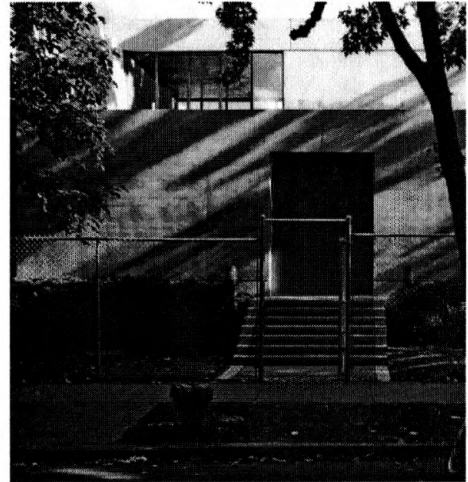


Figure 6.39 The entrance gate of the Lee house. Articulated on a bare, undecorated concrete wall, this entrance is intended to increase the feeling of entering with one’s own body and inculcate humanity in all who enter.



As a typical inner-urban lot in Chicago, the site of the Lee house is not physically expansive, yet the experience of the passageway for entry educes a feeling of deep space. In fact, quite a lot of time in one’s space journey is wasted on this approach. On the street, a dark hole-like gate on an undecorated concrete wall invites departure from the city (Figure 6.39). One is reminded of the well known three-foot by three-foot “crawl-through” gate in Japanese tea garden (Figure 5.12), for here also one is physically made conscious of entering with one’s own body. Even though the gate here is more than large enough to pass through in an upright manner, its human scale in relation to the immediate city surrounding is even smaller than that of the tea garden. This is Ando’s first technique to manipulate one’s sense of time and space by way of this interval to inculcate humanity in all who enter.

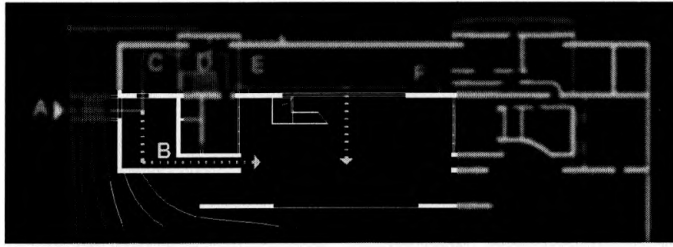
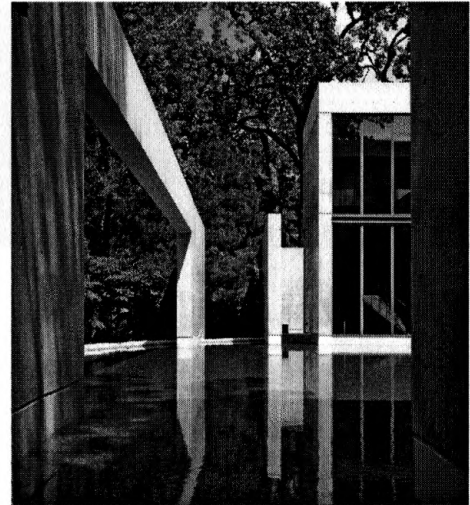


Figure 6.40 A fragmentary view of the inner courtyard from the forecourt for entry. The image of a remote destination is for the first time created in one's mind, and yet the physical approach is immediately denied by the expanse of water.



Where one is entering is not immediately disclosed; one is led into a light “well,” the forecourt for entry made of pure concrete surfaces. Although this court is of no more than 23ft by 18ft, the feeling of space is psychologically enlarged after one has squeezed through the entrance “hole.” If one takes a right turn here, a fragment of the inner court unfolds itself through the crevice-like space between walls (Figure 6.40). One’s destination is visually attained but physically denied by the expanse of water before one’s foot. However, the image of a remote destination is for the first time created in one’s mind.

Turning back and approaching over the concrete ground, one confronts a second, equally high gate that leads to another dry court. Since each court is almost entirely closed, one’s position relative to the overall spatial composition is indiscernible so that one is forced to concentrate on the scene at hand, to experience the “here” and “now” concretized in the fragment of sky and the concrete earth of the empty court (Figure 6.41). Such an enclosure is intended to prevent an overall view of space and evokes the impression of an invisible depth awaiting human discovery. This is a second manipulation of the “real” space, reminiscent of the traditional technique: “What one wants to enlarge, one first



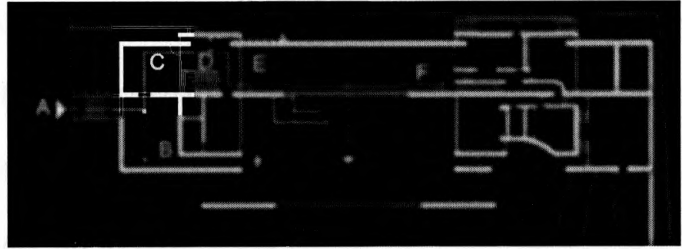


Figure 6.41 The second forecourt for entry. Here, one stands on the concrete earth and confronts a fragment of sky, yet one's position relative to the overall spatial composition is indiscernible so that one gets the impression of an invisible depth.

reduces experientially.” In addition to this, the passageway for entry is consciously detoured in a zigzag pattern so that the beginning and the end of one's approach is set experientially farther apart. Time is perceived longer with more turns in a given distance, and space is gained by slowing down time. This is the third technique to increase one's experience of a limited space and time.

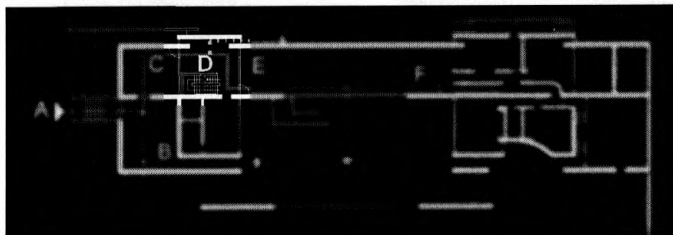
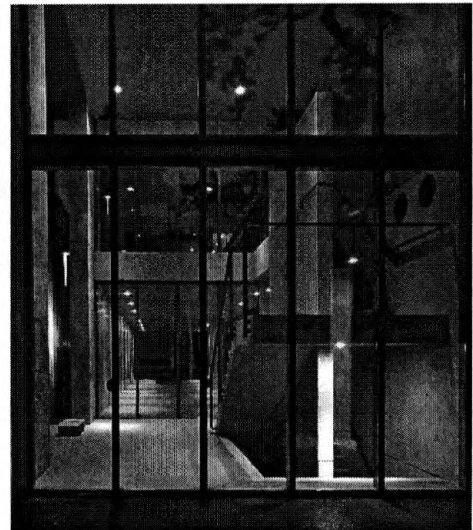


Figure 6.42 The entrance hall looking from the forecourt. Enticing one forward is a long, dim “space-tunnel” of bare concrete. Since there is little stimulus at the far end of this space tunnel, one gets the feeling of delving into an indefinite depth, with no absolute destination.



On one side of the second court, one finds a glazed gate. This is the third time that one enters but finally into the entrance hall of house interior (Figure 6.42). Enticing one forward is a long, dim “space-tunnel” (68ft long by 15 ft wide)

of bare concrete, with which Ando plays another trick on our sense of space-time. Usually, the elongated space of this kind (think of the human direction in western basilica) is articulated by emphasizing the end, thereby visual drama or focus is deliberately arranged in such a way as to evoke the sense of “there” and “then,” implying the ultimate destination of one’s movement.

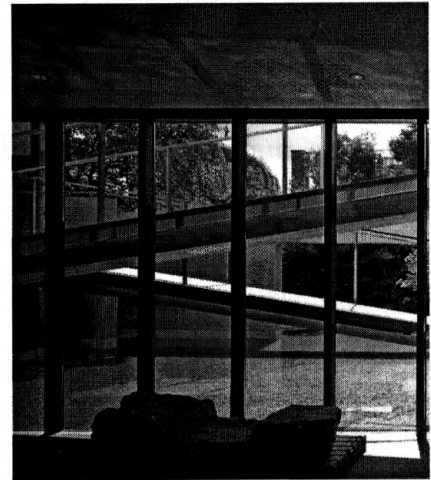
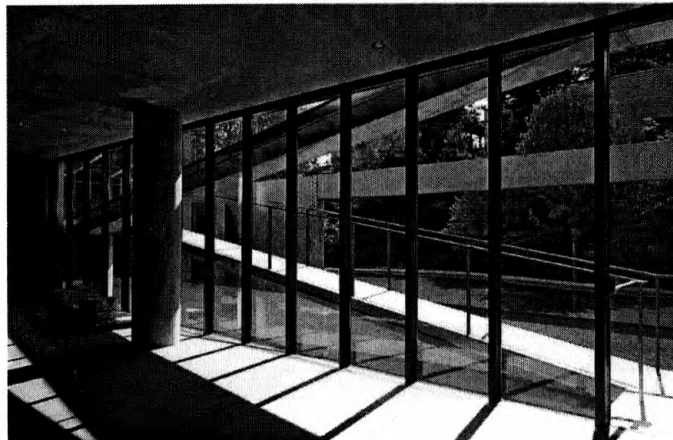
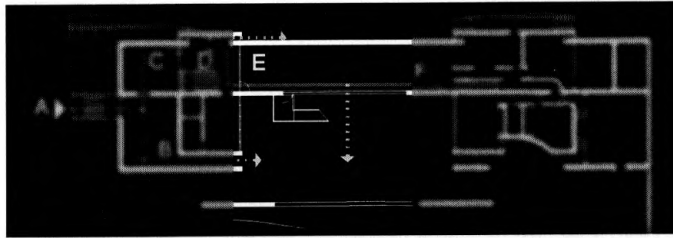


Figure 6.43 View of the inner courtyard juxtaposed side by side with the space tunnel. Ando also use the repetition of images or signs to indicate the sense of place.

In the case of Lee House however, there is little stimulus at the far end of this space tunnel; it does not lead to a visible destination, nor does it open outside. Approaching along, one rather gets the feeling of delving into an indefinite depth, in which an open, bright courtyard emerges unexpectedly side-by-side to one’s body (Figure 6.43). By virtue of this separating of the visual focus from the line of movement, Ando has de-emphasized the sense of the directional space and time and rejected the notion of an absolute destination and its associated climax. Instead, one is stimulated to seek drama in the process of

approaching it, wherein the emphasis is put on “here” and “now” as the representation of reaching the goal, allowing the sense of *oku*. And the central court is turned into a fragment wedged at an interval of one’s space-time tour, implying the sense of *ma*.

Meanwhile, one’s encounter of the inner courtyard here recalls the fragmentary view of the same scene from the forecourt, experientially taking one back to the place encountered before. The similar effect is seen in the way that Ando has deliberately placed a couple of sea rocks in the entry court as in the central space here. These elements are certainly not compositional elements, nor are they merely objects for display; they are signs consciously used to indicate the sense of place, or *ma* “that takes place in the imagination of the human experience these elements” (Nitschke, 1966, p.117)<sup>93</sup> This repetition of images or signs is the fourth technique in creating experiential space and time.

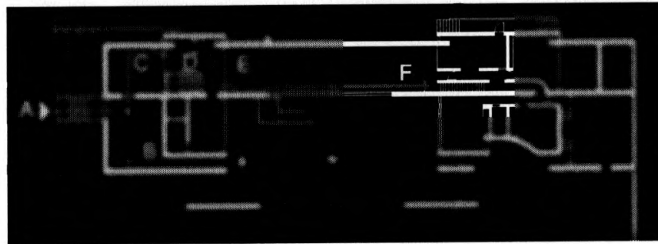


Figure 6.44 The Space tunnel looked back from the staircase. Here, the visitor leaves the first floor.



At the end of the space tunnel, a flight of stair entices one to move upwards (Figure 6.44). One is almost suddenly thrown outside and deposited in a stopping space where all sight of previous space scene is withdrawn from the observer (Figure 6.45). Walking out this sheltered void, which is in fact an

<sup>93</sup> Gunter Nitschke writes: “this Japanese sense of *ma* is not something that is created by compositional elements; it is the thing that takes place in the imagination of the human who experience these elements”. Gunter Nitschke, “‘MA’ The Japanese Sense of ‘PLACE’ in old and new architecture and planning,” *Architectural Design* (March, 1966), p.117.

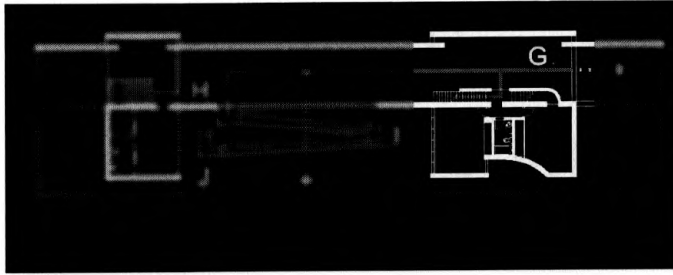
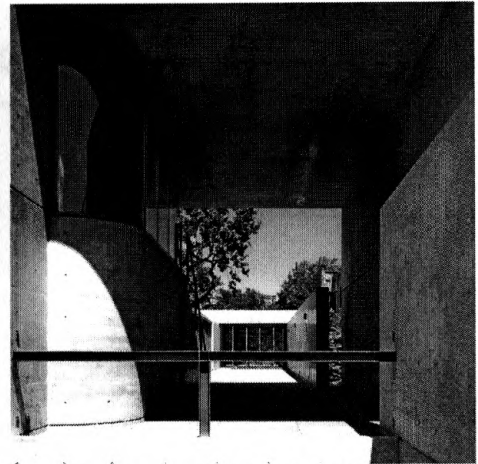


Figure 6.45 The stopping space as the transition between the movement from the first floor to the second floor, from interior to exterior. All sight of previous space scene is withdrawn here.



interstitial space between inside and outside, one gets the feeling of entering the house again, but in a different spirit. Now exposed to the open sky, a fifth technique is experienced (Figure 6.46). Along one's passage, physical contrasts are skillfully alternated between openness and enclosure, light and shade, sky and earth, water and dryness.

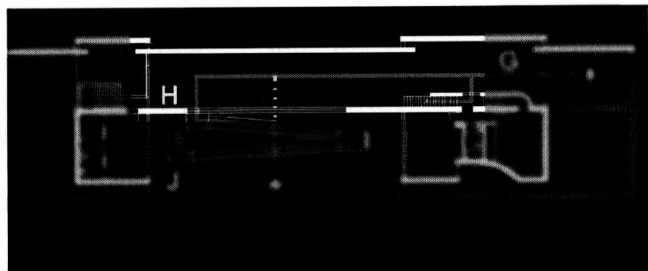
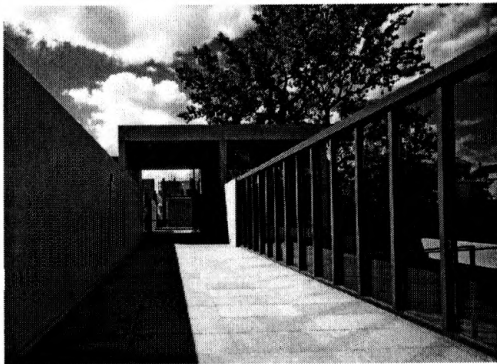


Figure 6.46 The open stage on the second floor. The visitor experiences the sky and a panoramic view of the central court below.

The long narrow stage entices one ahead, but does not impose the impact of speeding up, which is overwhelmed by an abundance of scenic highlights outside that attempts to freeze space experientially in a now-moment. This is the third time one looks at the central court, but the view is special, a panoramic overlook extending beyond the central court in the foreground to include the landscape in the distance. This is the sixth technique, namely "borrow scenery," that works to increase the depth of visual space by "borrowing" distant scenery



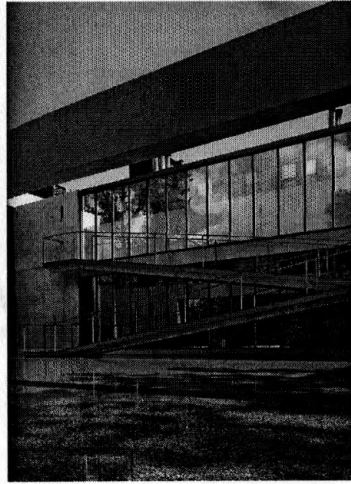
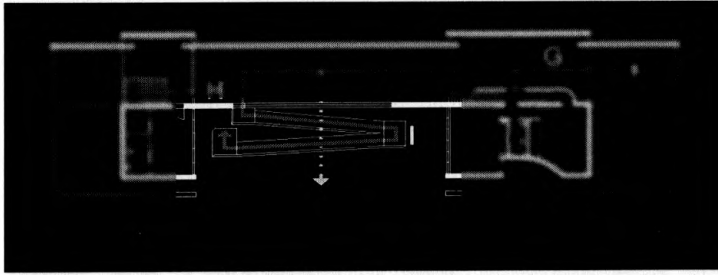


Figure 6.47 The ramp above the central court of water. The ramp physically turns one's body into the court and stimulates an intimate contact between body and water.

as the backdrop of the picture. Attracted by the magnificent sight, one moves on to descend by a ramp introduced at the end of the terrace (Figure 6.47). Whereas on the stage, one is visually directed outside the court, the ramp physically turns one's body into the court and stimulates an intimate contact with water. Descending, one experiences the sensation of levitation above air and finally enters again the space tunnel where one comes from (Figure 6.48).

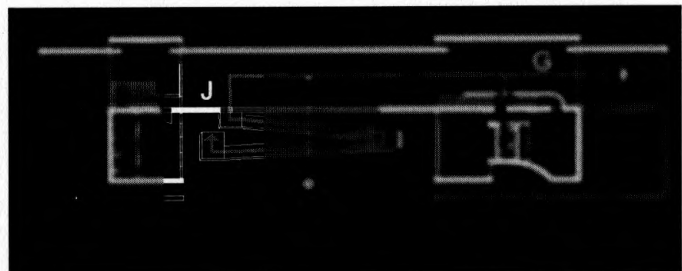


Figure 6.48 The end of one's space-time tour in the Lee House. Finally, one returns back to where one comes from and once again gazes the landscape in the distance.





Figure 6.49 The space-time sequence in line with the visitor's circularity of the Lee House.

The whole tour in the house is a three-dimensional circularity with the water court at the center, turning one first towards it, then away and finally back again. The experience is like that in Katsura Detached Palace, in which rooms of pavilions are scattered and deployed around natural features, particularly water. Although the composition of the Lee house may be grasped the moment one looks at its geometrical plan, the actual complexity of space as experienced transcends the simplicity and rigidity of its appearance, principally by the distortion of temporal dimensions so that the house cannot be perceived as a whole, but as a sequence of individual spaces (Figure 6.49). In this respect, Ando demonstrates the skillful handling of fragmentary spaces, which he inherited from tradition as Shuji Takashina writes: “Whereas Westerners tend to view space in a unified and convergent manner, that is, in terms of a discrete organized whole, the Japanese see it in a pluralistic, divergent manner, in terms of numerous interconnecting fragments” (Takashima, 1987, p.5).

The fragments in the house, whether courtyard, corridor, or staircase, while asserting their independent spatial characteristics, also act as “interval” in the sense of *ma* that simultaneously connect and separates each other. And Within this context, it is the spacing factor *ma* that works to sequence fragmentary spaces over a time parameter in such a way as to determine the temporal dimension of a “movement space” in the Lee House. Therefore despite its static, geometrical plan, one’s approach in the house is precisely a time-constructed process, through which fragmentary spaces, like a scroll picture, unfold a bit at a time towards an invisible depth created in one’s mind, which is

*oku*. The depth of this kind can hardly be understood three-dimensionally, but only as the two-dimensionality of *Ma*, which means in the depth exists a number of continuous time scales. Fumihiko Maki alludes to the experience of the Lee House when he writes:

The true dimension of depth is that of time. Planes of perception arrange themselves in a temporal, not a spatial succession. They correspond to the emergence of constantly changing present times, linked by an invisible line which is that of our own subjectivity and its successive response to them (Salat, 1988, p.29).

Based on these temporal scales, the space of the house is continuously made anew from place to place, moment to moment, so that all the emphasis is given to “here” and “now” while the “there” and “then” remains elusive. Or rather, the sense of “here” and “now” is the principle upon which the architectural space is created and experienced. As a result, the whole building rejects a fixed, single vista or perspective, ultimately rejecting the perception of a directional time. Instead, the time thus signified is flux, constantly changing in direction and flowing at different rates, as represented in the “multiplicity of directions of vision from a multiplicity of viewpoints made possible by the movement of *shintai*,” in the words of Ando. This strong commitment to flux brings Ando not only to the traditional sense of *ma*, but also to the Buddhist concept of “transience,” in which mutability and flux is perceived as the ultimate reality of the world. At the same time, spatial fragments of his building are turned into visual images of a metaphysical order.

The concern for the temporal context inevitably leads to the concern for eternity, on which Ando writes: “I want to try depicting the parts while suggesting

the whole, and capture the moment while giving glimpse of eternity” (Ando, 1995b, p.474). Once again, Ando finds an affinity with the Buddhist philosophy of “eternal now” so characteristic of the traditional Japanese cognition of time. In the Lee House, the experience of place is not created by compositional elements, but by the concrete scenes and signs that one records in memory and recalls later in their repetition. The whole character of a sequence of spaces is thus the image of fragments carefully created in one’s mind as one resides in and flows with the time. Eternity is therefore not the thing somewhere and sometime else, it is in the concreteness of the reality, the essential nature of place, which is always “here” and “present.” Using fragments, Ando intends to create an “experiential place,” which, beyond the transience of its physical presence, is able to inscribe itself deeply upon the spirit of people, achieving an eternal moment as an image in one’s memory. Renzo Piano writes:

I think that for an architect, to create something for eternity is the secret dream. What Ando does...is to create fragments, pieces, elements that are part of the creative experience. Because of its simplicity, clarity and primitiveness, it may last forever (Piano, 1991, p.95).

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION: AN OVERALL EVALUATION AND NEW HORIZONS FOR ANDO'S ARCHITECTURE

#### ***Ma* – the Empty Interval, Substantial Void**

In Japanese, the ideogram *ma* denotes the interval in both space and time. This idea has given to a peculiar, non-western concept of space in which it is not the principal space that is of greatest significance, but the *ma*, the leftover, empty space in between. Primarily, *ma* represents the interstitial void, imbued with substantial meanings. In Ando's work, this consciousness of *ma* is first of all evident in his creating of the "substantial voids" by way of two singular design interventions 1) the producing of a matrix of voids in the articulation of territory, and 2) the subsequent sublimation of interstitial voids into what he calls the "*sentiment-fundamental space*." In the first place, Ando exhibits a habitual reliance on geometric framework, by virtue of which site and nature are architecturalized and transformed into a system of highly structured voids. And it is his customary approach that, after ensuring the functional basics within that framework, Ando withdraws and invests the interstitial voids between functionally established spaces for the symbolic dimension of human life that cannot be reduced to rationality. The significance of Ando's work is his poetic rendering of these voids, with which Ando pursues the theme of the encounter of substantiality with emptiness. In the two works analyzed above, these voids are particularly presented in the form of the courtyards, which, even in the smallest



scale like that in the Church of the Light, introduce nature's evocative and simulative power in the guise of light, shadow, wind, rain, the irreducible, yet essential nature signified as "emptiness" that when assimilated into the fundamental aspects of daily life, appeals to the deep sentiment of human being and assumes a spiritual resonance. By way of his sensitive use of pure geometry and material as well as the abstract nature, Ando intends to converge architectural meaning to zero, the entity of bare essentials, and in so doing, provide man with the possibilities of creating "new relations between the space and the person" and thus new meanings of substantial existence. For Ando, empty space of this kind is perceived as an icon, a paradigm of "substantial void" that approaches the traditional sense of *ma*.

Furthermore, the ubiquitous voids presented in his work make possible two modes of time-structured experience of space: the experience depending on a cyclic time wherein the changing ethos of the void itself is rendered perceivable through the rhythmic transformation of nature, as in the case of the Church of the Light; and the experience depending on a fluxing time wherein the sequence of fragmentary voids are constructed through the vectorial movement of body and linked by an subjective line created in the mind, as in the Lee House. Ironically, relation with time evokes a sense of identification between subject and object inspired by the creative, active participation of the sentient being, "*shintai*" in Ando's phrase; at the same time, however, it determines an indefinite space of ceaseless transformation and thus assumes all its unseen, indeterminate potential which is *oku*. Within this context, the space in Ando's work never exists

as an absolute, static entity as in Western cases but instead exists in a number of continuous time scales. And it is exactly here that the traditional concept of *ma* as one entity of space-time is fully registered.

### ***Ma* – the Gap, Twofold Articulation of Realities**

In the first chapter, the traditional concept of *ma* is interpreted in terms of emptiness, and yet this emptiness is never really void, let alone vacuous; instead, it denotes an realm of void (spatial) and flux (temporal) wherein transformations and changes take place, as something underlined by the esoteric Buddhist concept of *ku*, or *Emptiness*, which defies any distinction between being and non-being but posits that both exist simultaneously. Inherent in the term “interval” lies an essential attribute of *ma*, which signifies the dual nature of existence.

Already implicit in his simultaneous expression of the substantial and void, the fundamental and sentiment, Ando’s works stems from this attribute of *ma*, which is consciously reinterpreted in his notion of “discontinuous continuity”, or “gap” between colliding elements in opposition.<sup>94</sup> Centered on this metaphysical level of “gap-*ma*,” the essential nature of Ando’s architecture may be identified as paradoxical on the ground that it has assumed a twofold articulation of realities, which have long been held as dichotomy in the Western world: center/periphery, nature/geometry, materiality/immateriality, space/time (the four categories of our evaluative study of the Church of the Light and the Lee House) all of which affect

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<sup>94</sup> Ando writes: “The gap between elements colliding in opposition must be opened. This gap – the *ma* concept peculiar to Japanese aesthetic is just such a place. *Ma* is never a peaceful golden mean, but a place of the harshest conflict. And it is with *ma* thus informed with harshness that I want to continue to try and provoke the human spirit.” Tadao Ando, “Thinking in *MA* – opening *ma*,” in *Tadao Ando: 1983 – 2000* (El Croquis Editorial, c2000), p.9.

additional protagonists of the dualities, including formal system and deviation, still proportions and dynamic rhythm, the elusiveness of nature and the man-made regularity, abstraction and representation, exteriorization and internalization, spatiality and substantiality, the significance of the sign of the Western and the silence of the void of the Eastern, light and dark, transience and eternity.

By virtue of these polar extremes, Ando intends to stimulate a robust dialogue or confrontation but never stress the opposition between one another. Beyond the apparent stability of that confrontation, polar elements collide and cancel out each other, producing a realm of new existence, wherein tension and potential emerges, that is, the state of emptiness at the heart of all things. It is within the mutual transformation of opposites that the extremeness of one accentuates its opposing partner, while both are recreated in a dynamic relation.

This singular approach markedly contrasts to the usual Western approach in which various elements are isolated rationally according to distinctive functions, resulting a serious loss of organic integrity and humanity. Ando's work detaches from the plane of relativity and embodies a quality of ambiguity that attempts the twofold expression of existence. Never occupying a fixed, single position, his architecture defies simple objectification and is to be understood through the checking of strong preconception, the suspending the rational and assertive mind. Ando writes: "I came to understand relations with actual experience architecture, not with my mind only, but with my whole experiencing being" (Ando, 1982, p.9). It is only when one delves into the gap between the thing as it appears and the thing as it is experienced that the substantial meaning dwelling in the empty

interval of *ma* transfers diverse wave vibration to the human spirit. And it is within the indefinite gap between the polar extremes that Ando produces poetry and significance in his architecture. *Ma*, as affirmed by Ando, ultimately and fundamentally denotes the gap of “relation.”

### ***Oku* – the Invisible, Empty “Center”**

As the above passage eventually makes clear, the endeavor of architecture for Ando is not something merely utilitarian, but is in inextricably linked to the enrichment of human spirit. In his works, Ando intends to create a centralized domain and establish a singular point from which we regain our humanity in the no-man’s-land of modern megapolis and orient ourselves in the world. In this respect, the traditional concept of *oku*, the original point of existence in land, serves to set the existential foothold of Ando’s architecture

In relation to physical spatial layout, the traditional principle of “*oku-wrap*” is predicated on the centripetal structure in the two buildings by Ando, wherein spatial layers penetrating step-by-step in depth, enabling the perception of *oku* at the innermost core. Apparently, one may judge Ando’s deployment of walls in his territorial delineation as an act of demarcation from the surrounding city chaos. And yet even with this purpose of exclusion, their purpose is also to emphatically include nature, such as light-and-shadow effects, as an inextricable component of space. In this latter connection, the concrete wall moves away from the massiveness and static solidity that one associates with the act of “demarcation” towards a more immaterial and ethereal architectural boundary in which

homogeneous planes "wrap" the space and give a sensation of open volumes. Once again, it is within this gap between paradoxical qualities that the essential meaning of Ando's concrete walls is perceived. And it is precisely here that Ando's deployment of concrete walls constitute not so much the mode of "center-demarcation," but rather "inner space-wrap," or "*oku*-envelopment" so characteristic of Japanese territory formation.

Within the spatial layout the Church of the Light and the Lee House, Ando has given the innermost space the closest relationship to nature by way of the internalization of the exterior so that the innermost core of the two works is turned into an indefinite, character-forming void constantly rendered perceivable by natural elements. And in so doing, it constitutes a "substantial void" created in the sense of *ma* that defiantly rejects the notion of the absolute "center," and yet evokes the sense of *oku*. In addition to this, there is a pronounced stress on an invisible depth, horizontally and not vertically, in the Church of the Light, wherein the central axis of the chapel extends beyond the limit of physical space and dissolves into an indefinite, remote place in such a way as to imply an "invisible center" informed by *oku*. While much the same experience is repeated in the Lee house, the rejection of the absolute "center" is reinforced by the water court, which makes the innermost space in any case an uninhabitable and unattainable zone that effectively gives rise to an "empty center".

In all these connections, the territory of the two works is defined not by reference to a fixed, absolute center, but by reference to something indeterminate that is enveloped and wrapped by layers of walls and spaces. And



the due expression of this is that the innermost space of the two works, regardless of their centralized position, turns out to be nothing more than an invisible, empty “center.” Further evocation of *oku* is effected within the temporal context of the buildings by introducing nature or human movement that serves to “temporalize” the structure of space, phenomenally or experientially. Space is thus never static but always unfolds in time something unseen, something unexpected, which is the elusive *oku*. The true value of Ando’s space is to be understood and perceived in the sense of *ma* and *oku* so much as they determine or even create the space itself.

### **New Horizons of Modern Architecture**

Ando’s consciously reinterpreting of the traditional sense of *ma* and *oku* reflects the two interrelated themes underlying the two works studied before: on one hand, there is a cultural criticism of western Modernism with regard to its universality, functionality, and rationality; and on the other, there is a preoccupation with an oppositional stance to the ever-escalating consumerism of the contemporary megapolis. As seen in the two works, Ando’s counterthesis to the modern reality so perceived is predicted in his resorting to the Japanese tradition which enables him to create an architecture centered on regional individuality in opposition to modernism on one hand and to establish an microcosmic domain for substantial existence in opposition to consumerism on the other. Ultimately, it is possible to remark that the originality and individuality

of Ando's works is articulated and perceived in the gap between the East and the West, between culture and civilization.

Throughout Ando's work, the deeper significance of his *sukiya* reference is constantly appreciated. In this respect, it may be claimed that Ando's work establishes first of all a precedent for a more indigenous critique that evokes the enduring yet latent spirit of Japanese vernacular architecture. Within this critique, Ando reveals a paradoxical attitude wherein he makes no effort on an iconological but instead a typological translation of Japanese tradition. Ando completely removes his architecture from any stylistic or formal features of *sukiya*, an awareness, as Frampton points out, "that this pervasive modern predicament cannot be resolved by any kind of fictitious "homecoming", that is to say, by the mere simulation of traditional Japanese timber construction or the use of evocative domestic components, such as the shoji screen or the tatami mat" (Ando, 1984, p.6). For Ando, this critical tradition originates from two levels. The first is his anti-consumerism stance. Ando realizes that even these nostalgic elements and styles have fallen victim to consumable images. The second reflects his opposition to Post-modernism, which coupled with consumerism, has resulted in the disaster of overflowing signs and surfeited feeling of modern city. Regarding the latter, Ando writes: "Post-modernism looked at only one aspect of Modernism and, in reaction, evoked the styles of the past. It ended up being a superficial debate about which forms were more interesting" (1991, p.14).

For Ando, therefore, tradition is signified as "void" rather than represented by traditionalized forms. In other words, Ando roots his architecture in the

intangible qualities and essential spirit of *sukiya*, of which its underlying sense of *ma* and *oku* is consciously reinterpreted in his work in such a way as to evoke the feeling of traditional space. Kiyoshi Takeyama alludes to this and cites calmness and purity, gentleness and clarity of mood of the basic characters which Ando's work have in common with *sukiya*.<sup>95</sup> It is clear that even within the turmoil of an industrialized urban fabric, Ando roots his ideology in a primitive sense and aims for a domain of tranquility that will awaken the spiritual sensibilities latent in contemporary humanity. At the same time, Ando conceives such a topological, tonal reference to tradition as an individual approach, a theory of values that opens new horizons for an architecture of regional identity.

Ando's paradoxical attitude towards indigenous tradition is mirrored in his critique of Western tradition. While stoically refusing a formal reference to *sukiya* tradition, Ando derives his architectural vocabulary from European Modernism, as explicitly in his adoption of industrialized materials and geometric compositions that Japanese architecture was unable to generate. Despite its destructive impact to indigenous culture, Ando recognizes the Modernism's continuous validity as a vital cultural force. As a result of his use of a restricted variety of materials and forms, Ando's architecture reveals a refined abstraction, which he sees as the greatest heritage of Modernism. However, such association with Modernism does not stem from his aesthetic preference, but rather from his ethical position. In a world overrun by media, Ando values the abstraction of modern forms to resist the sensory chaos and visual saturation of commercial architecture.

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<sup>95</sup> Kiyoshi Takeyama, "Tadao Ando: Heir to Tradition," *Perspecta* (20, 1982), pp. 163-180.

Conversely, when it comes to the evaluation of regional difference, Ando remains opposed to the abstract and homogeneous character of space produced by Modernism. And this abstraction is what he first battles insofar as he is concerned with the creation of a space for substantial existence that is “able to symbolize relations between human beings and things.”<sup>96</sup> Ironically, this strong aspiration to “beings and things” is not something unfamiliar to Western Modernism. Norberg-Schulz explains that the spirit of early Modernism is to restore modern man to “a true and meaningful existence,” as reflected in Le Corbusier’s slogan *Neue Sachlichkeit* suggesting “back to things” rather than “new rationalism”.<sup>97</sup> In fact, Le Corbusier resounds with Ando’s concern when he writes: “To take possession of space is the first gesture of the living, men and beasts, plants and clouds, the fundamental manifestation of equilibrium and permanence. The first proof of existence is to occupy space” (Corbusier, 1954, p.30).<sup>98</sup> Unfortunately, this vitality marking the beginning of classic Modernism finally succumbs to the abstract universality in the resulting International Style, as Ando puts it: “Although the modern age is supposed to have originated with the establishment of the individual, in its pursuit of rationalism and the ordering of the theories, it has abandoned the unspecified aspects of mankind, and has

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<sup>96</sup> Ando writes: “I want to charge architecture with a sense of life and a feeling of substantial existence by creating simple geometric forms with materials as limited as possible at present: unfinished concrete, stone, wood, steel, and so on. ..This space is a primitive one. It is able to symbolize relations between human beings and things when direct response and reflection are established between the building materials and such natural phenomena as light, wind, and water.” Tadao Ando, “New Relations between the Space and the Person,” *The Japan Architect* (October/November, 1977), p.44.

<sup>97</sup> “At the root of the modern movement, as identified by Le Corbusier, was the wish to help modern man to regain a true and meaningful existence. To achieve this he needed ‘freedom’ as well as ‘identity’...’Identity’ meant to bring man back to what is original and essential.” Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1980, c1979), p.192.

<sup>98</sup> This is also presented Le Corbusier, *New World of Space* (New York, Reynal & Hitchcock, 1948), p. 7.

attempted to produce a human nature that is uniform and anonymous and that can be analyzed simply within set limitations.”<sup>99</sup> Seen in this light, Ando’s approach may be setting up new goals and limits to Modernism by imbuing its abstract frame with specific attributes of regional identity, and in doing this, to regain the sense of humanity that has been rejected by Modernism. And it is precisely here that his critiques on Western tradition and on Eastern tradition merge with and complement each other.

Despite these legacies, however, Ando’s work is neither a synthesis nor a linear descendant of them, but a new entity of what he refers to as “enclosed Modern Architecture” wherein the open, universal force of modern architecture is oriented to an enclosed realm of indigenous character.<sup>100</sup> The originality and individuality of Ando’s work is to be found in such a gap wherein two legacies are mutually transformed and recreated, giving birth to a form of cross-cultural criticism.

Yet it is equally clear, as has been demonstrated in the two works, that Ando’s work also constitutes a criticism against contemporary consumerism for both Western and Eastern context. In a consumer-oriented modern megapolis wherein superficial convenience and material affluence is sought at the expense of spiritual richness, Ando’s work markedly stresses the substantial existence of the sentient being rather than the bourgeois comfort contaminated by consumerism. Once again, this end is achieved in virtue of the dual nature of his architecture. In the first place, Ando regards the modern form of his architecture,

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<sup>99</sup> Tadao Ando, “A Wedge in Circumstances,” *The Japan Architect* (June, 1977), p.73.

<sup>100</sup> Ando writes: “And I suppose it would be possible to say that the method I have selected is to apply the vocabulary and techniques developed by an open, universalist Modernism in an enclosed realm of individual life styles and regional difference.” Tadao Ando, “From Self-enclosed Modern Architecture Towards Universality,” *The Japan Architect* (May, 1982), pp. 8-9.



in virtue of its silence and abstract, as a protective shield that is categorically opposed the infinite space-field of consumerism. The second, more significant aspect is his consciously reinterpretation of the traditional sense of *ma* and *oku*, through which Ando intends to imbue our humanity with a profound reality, formless and yet essential, transcendental yet fundamental. In the two works, this ideology is predicated on emphasizing “emptiness” which, be it physical or metaphysical, is presented in his “empty space,” the “empty center” created in light of *ma* and *oku*.

Ando's view, in summary, is to rethink and reinterpret the tradition while being wedged in contemporary circumstance and to participate into the modern world while not being absorbed by it. Ultimately, Ando's architecture may be evaluated as original on the ground that it assumes a criticism that is valid for the West as for the East, for cultural tradition as for contemporary civilization.

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